

Agenda Materials for the 152nd meeting of
Classis Lake Erie
of the Christian Reformed Church
to be held in Dearborn, Michigan, March 2, 2019

Supplement

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New Testament (Classis-Assigned) Sermon

SangMyung Samuel Lee

“Finding Contentment in a Discontented World” Philippians 4:10-13

Intro

In his book, “Life-Changing Love,” Ptr. John Ortberg tells this story of a young girl whose parents took her to the Shrine of the Golden Arches. There she saw an opportunity to buy a combination of food and a little toy that someone, in a fit of marketing genius, named the Happy Meal.

“May I have it, please?” she asked her parents. “I must have it. I don’t think I could live without it.”

“No,” her parents told her. “The toy is a trivial little thing that just enabled the price of this package to be raised beyond what it is really worth. It’s not in the budget. We can’t do it.”

“But you don’t understand,” she thought. She **knew** that they would not just be buying fries, McNuggets, and a dinosaur stamp, they would be buying happiness. She was convinced that she had a little McVacuum at the core of her soul: “Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in a Happy Meal.”

So she explained, “I want that Happy Meal more than I’ve ever wanted anything before. And if I get it, I’ll never ask for anything again—ever. No more complaining. No more demanding. If you get me that Happy Meal, I’ll be content for the rest of my life.”

This seemed like a pretty good deal to her parents, so they bought it.¹

Do you think it worked? Do you think she grew up to be a contented, grateful, joyful person? No?

Why not?

You would think that after a while kids would catch on, that they would say, “You know, a Happy Meal never brings lasting happiness; I’m not going to get suckered into it this time.” But it doesn’t happen. When the excitement wears off, they need a new fix, another Happy Meal.

They keep buying them, and they keep not working.

But the question is, does this just happen to children?

Don’t we do the same thing even as we get older? It’s just that our version of Happy Meals get more expensive.

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Often times, when we talk about sin, we talk about sin as something that we do. As something that involves our action.

But I think it’s also important to talk about sin as our condition. It’s not something that we can control. It’s more like a disability or a deficiency that has been inherited, passed down to us.

And I think one of those sinful condition that we find within ourselves is a heart of discontentment.

We have this unending search for Happy Meals, unending search for more and better things.

And the root of this goes all the way back to Genesis. First book of the Bible.

¹ John Ortberg, “Life-Changing Love: Moving God’s Love from Your Head to Your Heart

In the beginning, God creates the world out of love. God creates the world as an outward extension/overflow of his love. Basically, in Genesis 1, God is building a beautiful home, and he's inviting human beings to live in it with him.

And in the beginning, we see this beautiful picture of peace, harmony, and contentment. Peace and harmony between Adam and Eve and between human beings and God. We call this shalom. Shalom is peace, harmony, wholeness.

But in Genesis 3, sin, the root of our discontentment, enters into the world. The serpent comes and tempts Eve, "If you eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you'll be like God."

But the thing is, Adam and Eve were already like God because they were created in his image. But now they are dissatisfied, they are no longer content with where they are, and they try to become like God on their own.

So we learn that this deep sense of discontentment, dissatisfaction is as old as sin itself.

And ever since the Fall, the search for Happy Meal, the search for more and better things has been our story.

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Even though, we live in a time where we've never been healthier, cleaner, richer, and better informed in the history of humanity. Even though, we live in one of the wealthiest and strongest nation in the world. Our lives are far from contentment.

I heard a stand-up comedian talk about how we who live in the 21st century take technology for granted. He was talking about how people take out their phone, they would look up something and be like, "Ah, it's so slow." And the comedian's like, "Give it a second! It's going to space! Can you give it a second to come back from space?"

And he tells another story where he was in an airplane and there was internet, high-speed internet on the airplane. And this was a new thing that they were just starting to do. So he was sitting on the plane, using this internet, watching youtube on his laptop, fascinated by this newest thing. And then the internet breaks down, and they apologize, and at that moment, the guy next to him slams his laptop and says, "Ahhh! This is bullcrap." And the comedian says, "how quickly the world owe him something, which he knew existed only 10 seconds ago."²

And we laugh because what he says is so true. That's us.

Let me give some examples of discontentment to see if you relate to any of these things:

- I find myself bored or dissatisfied with school.
- I find myself bored or dissatisfied with my work. I expect it not only to pay my bills but to provide me with a sense of identity and significance
- I try to escape from my discontentment. I seek relief or distraction through computer games, social media, watching Youtube, shopping, pornography, or alcohol.

² Louis CK, "About airplane WiFi" youtube.com

- I grow resentful or envious of those people whose life seem better off than mine.

Yet, we often think, "Oh, if I can just date this guy or this girl, if I can get the right career, if I can get into this school, if I can make a certain amount of money, I'm going to be content with my life."

Or if we go deeper, we sometimes wish we were someone else. "If I was from that family instead of my own, if I had those abilities instead of the ones I've been given, if I was born with that body instead of one that's mine, then I will be content.

But will we really be content if we get what we want?

I hate to break it to you or maybe you know it already. Even when we reach all of those things, we'll find that we are a lot less happy than we imagined. Then we become disillusioned which makes us even more discontent.

And when we find ourselves discontented, we either keep searching and hoping for the next thing to bring us contentment or we just give up and have a fatalistic, pessimistic view on life, that this something, this contentment we are looking for can never be had in this world.

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And because this is the condition that we find ourselves in, quite honestly, it's hard for us to relate to Paul when he says that he's content.

When Paul is writing this letter to the Philippians, to the church in Philippi, Paul is not in the greatest of situations. His life is far from what we would describe as success.

Paul is in jail. He is in poverty. He's locked up in jail for preaching the gospel. He might face death at any time. He's in a pretty terrible situation.

And in today's text, Paul is expressing his gratitude to the Philippians for their help. The Philippians have been very good to Paul in his trouble. They supported him financially; they even sent one of their members to help Paul in prison.

But Paul quickly adds, in verse 11, "I'm not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances."

So Paul's basically saying, "I'm grateful for your help, but I didn't really need it. Because I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.

And what Paul says, really irritates me.

"Good for you man. Congratulations Paul. You are better than the rest of us. Are you happy now?"

"I haven't learned to be content in every situation that I am in. I'm not there yet."

You know, Paul, after his encounter with Jesus, he has spent his life trying to do the right thing. Trying to do the right thing for God, trying to do the right thing for the church, trying to do the right thing for the people.

But what did he get in return? His life looks pretty crappy, right? He's locked up in prison.

And most people, if they were dealt Paul's cards, they would be pretty upset. They would be bitter.

Yet we read in today's text that he's not stuck worrying about whether the Philippians send him money or not. It's nice to have the help, but his world is not governed by his circumstances.

And we ask, "How can he say that he's content? How do you do that through jail, through countless beating, through poverty? What is the secret of being content in any and every situation?"

And Paul tells us this secret in verse 13. "I can do all this through him who gives me strength."

This is a pretty famous verse.

You've probably seen t-shirts, wristbands, mugs, or even tattoos with this verse written on them. In the Christian college that I went to, I saw a lot of weight lifters wearing a jersey that had this verse written on it.

This is also a favorite verse for a lot of athletes.

A NBA player named Steph Curry has a part of this verse written on his shoes.

Philippians 4:13 is often used as a confidence booster, some call it the "superman verse."

"I can win this game, I can be successful, I can lift 50 more pounds when I bench press, I'm going to ace my exams, through Christ who gives me strength."

It's almost like Jesus is some genie. Having faith in Jesus becomes like a "good luck" charm. Jesus will give you extra measure of strength or ability to do more, to do better, and help you succeed.

But when we see this verse in context, when we look at Paul's life, it's pretty clear that's not what Paul is talking about here, right? His life is far from winning another NBA championship, he is not busting out through his prison cell.

So what does Paul mean when he says, "I can do all this through him who gives me strength?"

People in Paul's day called the Stoics talked about contentment in terms of self-sufficiency. As something that comes from within oneself.

But here, Paul is presenting a radically new idea. He's saying that contentment comes from outside, that it comes from beyond himself. For Paul, contentment comes not from himself, but from Jesus.

I think for Paul, being in Christ, does not necessarily change his situation, his circumstances, but it changes his response to his circumstances.

Somehow being in Jesus enables him to stop comparing himself with other people around him. Somehow being in Jesus, enables him to say, whatever the situation, what I have, who I am is enough. I am content.

Paul has found his identity in Jesus. He has placed his worth, his value, his validation, not based on the things around him.

His life matters not because of what he has or doesn't have, not because of what he has done in his life, but his life matters because of what God has done in Jesus Christ. He has placed his validation on his savior who has died for him.

And that's what enables Paul to say, "I'm content." "I don't need another Happy Meal."

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And I can end my sermon here and invite us to sing: "Christ is enough for me. Christ is enough for me. Everything I need is in You. Everything I need."

But honestly, I think sometimes this is easier said than done.

Like I shared earlier, there are times where we find Paul hard to relate.

Because discontentment is our natural condition ever since the Fall.

It's a struggle to find contentment when things are not going in the way that we want them to. Especially when we are going through difficult and dark seasons in our lives.

But what I find to be comforting in this passage is the word "learn." Paul is writing this letter near the end of his life. And Paul says that he has "learned" to be content, he has "learned" the secret of contentment. Even for Paul, finding contentment in Jesus is not a natural thing for him. That's why he says that he has "learned" to be content. Our faith is a journey, not a destination.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, God knows that we live with this sinful condition of discontentment, not only that we try to steal his throne, we try to fill his throne with other things, yet he still chose to love us. In Jesus, God willingly gave up his throne and entered into our sinful condition.

What this means is that there is nothing that we can experience, difficulties in life, loss, depression, loneliness, rejection, fear, even discontentment, that Jesus does not understand.

Jesus, on the cross, experienced all of the burdens and the weight of our sin, our discontentment, so that in him, through him, we may experience life, that we may have contentment.

So whatever comes our way, whatever circumstances we are in, we live with hope.

Because this Jesus who died on the cross, rose back from the dead, and he sits on the right hand of the Father, and he's coming again to make all things new.

New Church Development February/March 2019 Update

CRC Classis Lake Erie

Mark Van Andel

Hesed Community Church – Rev. Mark Van Andel and Rev. Nate Bull continue to partner in this joint CRC /RCA venture in Detroit. After four years in the Brightmoor neighborhood including a year and a half of discipleship classes, four faithful neighborhood servants have been raised up to be leaders. One of those leaders is now being sent to the east side of Detroit where she will be the house supervisor for a second ministry house in the Morningside neighborhood in partnership with First CRC of Detroit. Hesed Community Church received a grant to purchase the home and is in process of making an offer on a house that will need some rehabilitation work before getting started with ministry in that neighborhood this summer. The plan is to continue to expand this neighborhood-focused ministry through street ministry and discipleship across the city. Nate and Mark are grateful for their relationships with CRC and RCA churches across the region and are open to visits and preaching that will continue to strengthen our connection within the churches of the Classis. You can contact Mark and Nate at: hersedcc@gmail.com.

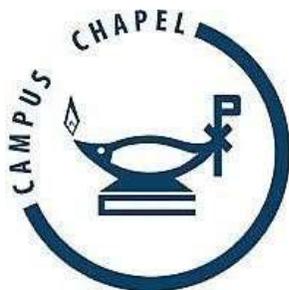
New Opportunities - Mark Van Andel, in his role of Local Mission Leader for Resonate, continues to connect with new potential ministry leaders. On March 6th, he will meet with two ministry leaders in Grand Rapids, who feel called and have already begun to minister among **immigrant communities in Detroit**. Please continue to pray that we will develop a cooperative holistic mission network of ministries across Detroit that will mutually benefit each other for Kingdom expansion.

Also, Nathan Groenewold, a seminary student pursuing ordination within the CRC, is doing an research internship within Southeast Michigan to explore the possibility of starting a **“Cohort of Missioners”** in Detroit. This program has been developed in Latin America and Resonate Global Mission is seeking to expand to North America. The program invites young adults from across North America to serve a year alongside local emerging leaders within ministries in urban areas. Please pray for and consider how this program may foster spiritual and leadership development amongst young adults in our denomination.

**Classis Lake Erie
Ministers Eligible for Delegation to Synod 2019**

Note: Synod will be held from Friday, June 14 to Thursday, June 20, 2019, at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Ackerman, Matt
Apol, Phil
Bae, Joseph Hun-Suk
Bieber, Ken
Bouma, Rolf
Engle, Randall
Ettema, Kendra
Gritter, Nathan
Groen, John
Kim, Brandon
Kim, Daniel Hong Youn
Kim, John Y.
Kronemeijer-Heyink, Brenda
Lanham, Chris
Oh, Christian
Park, Jung Un
Snider, Alex
Stulpnagel, Julie
Sung, David K.
Van Andel, Mark
Van Arragon, Ben
Vang, Zongseng
Visser, Terence
Wassink, Brent
Winters, Harry
Workman, Rhonda



CAMPUS CHAPEL AND CENTER FOR FAITH & SCHOLARSHIP

Rev. Matthew Ackerman

Campus Chapel Pastor Interim Director, Center for Faith and Scholarship

Bailey Sarver

Pastoral Associate

2018-19 Board Members (with board term expiration date)

Lauren Bylsma (June 2019): A graduate of the Master's Degree program at Michigan's School of Public Health, Lauren works for a public health consulting firm. She is also a graduate of Calvin College, and grew up in Brookfield, Wisconsin, attending Brookfield CRC. She is Vice-President of the Board.

Philip Christman (June 2020): Phil is a faculty member of the University of Michigan English Department, as well as a freelance writer and journalist. He is a graduate of Calvin College and did his graduate studies at Marquette University and the University of South Carolina. He is a member of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church.

John Kloosterman (June 2020): John is a faculty member in Michigan's Department of Computer Science, where he specializes in nuances of coding mobile applications. He is a graduate of Calvin College, and grew up in Barrie, Ontario, where his family owns a dairy farm. He is the President of the Board.

Geneva Langeland (June 2020): A recent graduate of the Master's program in the School for Environment and Sustainability, Geneva works for the Ann Arbor office of NOAA's Sea Grant program. She grew up in Grand Rapids attending Cascade Fellowship CRC and did her undergraduate degree at Calvin College. Geneva is also a member of the Chapel Leadership Team.

Christina Postema (June 2021): A long-time member of the Campus Chapel community, Chrissy works as a Media Specialist for Ann Arbor Public Schools. Chrissy has previously served as the Campus Chapel treasurer and is now the Secretary of the Board.

Rebecca Timmermans (June 2021): Becca is a Campus Chapel member. She works at Eastern Michigan University as the Coordinator for their Volunteer Center. She is a graduate of Calvin College and the U of M School of Social Work.