

There once was a rich man who was disturbed to find a fisherman just sitting beside his boat. "Why aren't you out there fishing?" he asked.

"Because I've caught enough fish for today," said the fisherman.

"Why don't you catch more fish than you need?" the rich man asked.

"What would I do with them?"

"You could earn more money," came the impatient reply, "and buy a better boat so you could go deeper and catch more fish. You could purchase nylon nets, catch even more fish, and make more money. Soon you'd have a fleet of boats and be rich like me."

The fisherman asked, "Then what would I do?"

"You could sit down and enjoy life," said the wealthy man.

"What do you think I'm doing now?" the fisherman replied.

Which way do you lean—towards the rich man, or the fisherman? Today we have the chance to think about one of the hidden values of the Christian faith. That "hidden value" is contentment. Do you know the secret of being content?

In our Epistle lesson, Saint Paul is writing to the congregation in Philippi, and near the end of his letter, this is what he says: "I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me." Paul can be content because he has Christ, and Christ has him.

Now, before, I said contentment was a hidden value. What I mean is that contentment is counter-cultural. It's the opposite of how we are trained to think. Have you ever heard an advertisement that begins by saying, "What you have right now is OK. You don't really need anything else"? Of course not! We are plugged into a consumer culture that is constantly trying to convince you that you won't really be happy, you won't really be fulfilled, unless you buy this product immediately. What you've got isn't good enough, and you won't be good enough until you get more. We have been taught to always want more, bigger, better, newer and human nature happily complies. Let me just ask you one question: Has this chase after more made you happy yet?

God knew that we needed to be saved from ourselves and our own out-of-control desires for more. That's why Jesus became one of us. That's why he lived perfectly—and his perfect life was all about giving, not receiving. That's why he sacrificed his life on the cross—because no bigger and better payment we could come up with would work to pay off the debt of our sin.

That's why he came back to life—to give you life that is free from the exhausting chase after more. In Christ, you truly have all things. It was this connection to Christ Jesus that enabled Paul to say: I can handle having plenty of stuff, and I can handle not having any stuff, because either way, I have Jesus, and Jesus has me. Christ at the center of life. That's the secret.

Through the adoption of baptism and the gift of faith you become a family member and friend of the Almighty God. He shares his riches with you, and unlike worldly wealth, His riches go with you out of this world. He gives you identity. He defines you as His own child. You no longer have to define yourself by what you buy and how new it is or how expensive it is. Instead of running after those things, you are free to run after Christ! Content with what you have and who you are, you can run after godliness and faith! Content with the identity God has given you, you can pursue love, endurance and gentleness. It is good and right for you to want more of these things, because they will actually fill you up! Pursue the way of Jesus. Let Christ break the cycle of more that controls your thinking. Enjoy the life that flows from Him, and you may just learn that contentment is right under your nose.

There is a story about the millionaire William Randolph Hearst. He invested a fortune in collecting art treasures from around the world. One day he heard about a valuable artifact. So he sent his agent abroad to look for it. After months of searching, the agent finally found the treasure. To the surprise of Hearst, the priceless masterpiece was stored right in his own warehouse. He had been searching all over the world for a treasure he already owned.

In God's great design, you may already have what you thought you wanted. Let him take off the "more goggles" so you can take a new look around at your life. What riches you have! What love you've been shown! All of it given in hopes that you will be drawn to the Giver—that you will be overwhelmed by his generosity—and find contentment in Him.