

9.22.2019 Trinity 14 (Philippians 4:4-13)

A few weeks ago I watched a documentary titled *The Long Goodbye*, which tells the story of Kara Tippets, a young Christian wife and mother of four who was diagnosed with cancer in the summer of 2012. *The Long Goodbye* is an intimate look into daily life in the Tippets' home as this family journeys through a seemingly impossible ordeal. Kara's husband is a pastor, so as you can imagine friends, family, and their congregation were all praying for her recovery, but the many aggressive cancer treatments that Kara endured were not successful, and as the cancer spread Kara, her husband, and their four small children were forced to confront the harsh reality of sickness and death. Kara Tippets' story is one of courage in the midst of her greatest trial, of trust in the Sovereign power of God, of His grace "*to help in time of need*" (Hebrews 4:16), and perhaps most of all her story is one of faith, the tested and unwavering faith of a woman who had learned that all she needed to face the ever changing uncertainty of this earthly life is Jesus.

Kara Tippets departed this life in His faith and fear in March of 2015. Shortly before that day she wrote these words: My little body has grown tired of battle, and treatment is no longer helping. But what I see, what I know, what I have is Jesus. He has still given me breath, and with it I pray I would live well and fade well, by degrees doing both, living and dying. As I have moments left to live, I get to draw my people close, kiss them and tenderly speak love over their lives. I get to pray into eternity my hopes and fears for the moments of my loves. I get to laugh and cry and wonder over Heaven. I do not feel like I have the courage for this journey, but I have Jesus—and He will provide. He has given me so much to be grateful for, and that gratitude, that wondering over His love, will cover us all. And it will carry us—carry us in ways we cannot comprehend.

As I watched her story and read her words, I knew that I would share them with you, and do so this morning in the context of St. Paul's inspired words to the Philippians. Paul writes, "*I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*" (Philippians 4:11-13).

Philippians 4:13, which states, *“I can do all things through Christ which strengthen me”* is one of the most frequently quoted and well-known verses in the Bible. These words are often taken out of context and used to proclaim the false notion that if we believe in Christ and follow our dreams we will land the perfect job, make millions of dollars, find our soul mate, raise talented, successful children, and finally write a best-selling book about how we did it all. Philippians 4:13 is one of the most popular verses in the Bible, but when you take a moment to consider the fact that Paul wrote these words from inside the walls of a first-century prison, you quickly realize that this verse is also one of the most misunderstood, misused, and misinterpreted.

As St. Paul wrote these words under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he was not saying that through Christ you can do anything you want to do. These words are not a guarantee that those who believe will overcome every obstacle, climb to new heights, or see their dreams fulfilled. Instead, when you consider the message they convey of peace in both victory and defeat, what you find is that these words are meant to serve as a reminder to every believer that to have Christ, is to have everything. That’s exactly what Kara Tippets wrote shortly before she died: the “treatment is no longer helping. But what I see, what I know, what I have is Jesus.”

So, once again, when you consider the context you find that St. Paul is not encouraging Christians to dream bigger dreams, he’s reminding us that we can endure the crushing feeling of defeat when our hopes and dreams for the future aren’t realized. He’s not telling us to go out and conquer the world, instead he’s saying that in Christ, with Christ, and *through Christ who strengthens me* we can press on when it feels like the world has conquered us. Like Paul writes, we can be *“content... in whatsoever state I am.”* We can be *“content... everywhere and in all things,”* because like Kara Tippets, what we see, what we know, what we have is Jesus, and He is the key to finding peace in every circumstance, *“the peace of God which passeth all understanding”* (Philippians 4:7).

When we view the victories and the failures of this ever-changing earthly life from the Christian perspective, what we find is that an intimate relationship with our Lord is not only the most essential element of our lives, from an

eternal perspective our relationship with God is our life. It is God Himself who “*gives to all mankind life and breath and everything*” (Acts 17:25), and therefore, what begins on Sunday morning when we meet to worship and adore, to laud and magnify His glorious Name must continue throughout the week. God doesn’t separate Sunday from Monday, the sacred from the secular, or religion from the rest of the week. He doesn’t devote an hour to us and then move on. Neither can we do so with Him. What begins with our Sunday morning corporate worship, continues with our hidden, personal prayers, and ends in a life where it no longer matters if we’re rich or poor, victorious or defeated, happy or heartbroken, because those who belong to Christ celebrate every victory, endure every difficulty, and *do all things through Christ who strengthens me*.

In its proper context, Philippians 4:13 is not a kind of momentous, battlefield cry to rise to the occasion, Philippians 4:13 is instead a call to rise to every occasion. In its most basic sense, to say, *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me*, is to say, that through Christ, I can press on in every circumstance. I can walk humbly with God to mountain tops, or even *through the valley of the shadow of death*, fearing no evil, *for thou art with me* (Psalm 23:4).

I’m convinced this was Kara Tippets’ perspective as she walked *through the valley of the shadow of death*, enduring a painfully long goodbye, and knowing that if our Lord tarries we will all experience physical death, in her story I believe we find a beautiful example of how we should be living until that day comes. I leave you with her words hoping that you can say the same thing yourself: What I see, what I know, what I have is Jesus. He has still given me breath, and with it I pray I would live well and fade well, by degrees doing both, living and dying. As I have moments left to live, I get to draw my people close, kiss them and tenderly speak love over their lives. I get to pray into eternity my hopes and fears for the moments of my loves. I get to laugh and cry and wonder over Heaven. I do not feel like I have the courage for this journey, but I have Jesus—and He will provide. He has given me so much to be grateful for, and that gratitude, that wondering over His love, will cover us all. And it will carry us—carry us in ways we cannot comprehend.