Philippians 4:11b-13 I have learned to be content in any circumstances in which I find myself. I know what it is to live in humble circumstances, and I know what it is to have more than enough. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, while being full or hungry, while having plenty or not enough. I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.

 Have you ever noticed how life is such a roller coaster? What I am talking about is how life is full of so many ups and downs. One day things are peachy, the next day things are nothing but the pits. It is this roller coaster aspect of life that can make life real tough to handle. This roller coaster effect can really have an impact on your outlook of life.

 What do I mean by “your outlook of life?” Basically I am talking about how you view and see life, and then also we are talking about how you react to life and its ups and downs. In other words, a good working understanding of life, especially life as God explains it, is important.

 If you are like most people your outlook will depend on just how things are going. If things are going fairly smooth, you are joyful and upbeat. If things are going anything but smooth, you are probably feeling pretty bleak, perhaps your feeling very burdened and almost overwhelmed.

 Of course, the problem with an outlook that changes all the time is that it puts us into that “roller coaster” pattern. You know what I mean. Life becomes a real up and down struggle. That’s not all that bad if you are on the up side, but when you are on the down side life can be a real chore, dare I say it, an absolute struggle to function.

 What would you say if I told you that life didn’t have to be a roller coaster? What would you say if I told you that you don’t have to feel overwhelmed or you don’t have to let the circumstances and events of life affect how you view life and then affect how you feel about life? What would you say if I told you that the so-called stresses of life, and they exist, don’t have to overwhelm you and that, in truth, with practice and faith, you can get through anything life throws at you because you have developed a unique way of handling the stresses life can throw your way?

 Those are not just shallow questions. Those questions can find their answer in the Scriptures. There is no better place to go than to God’s Word to learn how to live, to learn God’s plan for living, to learn what God says you will be able to do. There is no better place to go because the Bible is the revealed knowledge of God and who knows the human race better than God? Who knows the limits, the capabilities, and the deepest thoughts of people better than the very God who created them, who loves them and who became like them in order to save them from sin, death and the devil, those very things that plague and infest our lives? Yes, God can and does provide answers for a better, a stronger way of life.

 This morning let’s consider what God says about life and how to live it. Our theme will be: **ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST.**

 Seriously, we can’t start this conversation on improving your outlook and life without first grasping what God’s revelations about life are. That is important for us to do because it helps us to develop a very realistic outlook on life. But more important, it helps us to develop a God pleasing outlook on life.

 What is the first thing that God reveals? He reveals a rather brutal truth about humans. God reveals that mankind, once created perfect and holy, is now a sinner. When the full force of that truth hits you, you will begin to understand why things are the way they are in the world. There is not a thing in the world that can’t be explained by sin and its devastating force in the world. Death? The result of sin. Disease, sickness and poor health? The result of sin. Struggles, hardships, evil works and all errors? The result of sin.

 Sin is a part of our lives. That tells you that you can expect that things will go wrong, that life will snap at you, and that at times life will brutalize you! The world is not perfect. Even when humankind strives its best, sin will take its toll. That is the simple and brutal fact of life.

 Why do I tell you this? So that when sin rears its ugly head in your life, and it will, you won’t be shocked and totally dismayed. You will be able to look sin in the eye and say, “God told me you would happen!” It is much easier to face the disappointments of life, to weather its storms, and to stand against **“the flaming arrows of the Evil One”** (Eph. 6:16). It is easier when you know and understand their cause. It is even much better when you need to face yourself, your own shortcomings and faults, when you know that sin is at the roots!

 Such is the way that sin has infected mankind. Listen to God’s description of sins impact on life. These words are found in Romans 1:28-31. **“Since they did not consider it worthwhile to hold on to the true knowledge of God, God handing them over to a corrupted mind to do things that should never be done. They are filled with every kind of unrighteousness, evil, greed, and wickedness. They are full of envy, murder, quarreling, deceit, and malice. They are gossipers, slanderers, God-haters, insolent mockers, arrogant boasters, and loudmouths. They dream up evil things. They disobey their parents. They are senseless, faithless, heartless and merciless.”**

 Sounds rather hopeless, doesn’t it? It isn’t! It isn’t because of God’s plan for living. Thanks be to God that He has provided a way to defeat the power of sin. God has provided his Son, Jesus. Through Jesus the horror of sin has been destroyed. That doesn’t mean that we are no longer sinners or that our world is no longer affected by sin. What it means is that through faith in Jesus, we will, at the end of this life, be taken to a place where there is no sin. A place called heaven. A place where we will live for eternity in the perfection that God intended for us. Here is how this wonder is expressed in 2 Corinthians (4:16-17), **“Therefore we are not discouraged. But even if our outer self is wasting away, yet our inner self is being renewed day by day. Yes, our momentary, light trouble produces for us and eternal weight of glory that is far beyond any comparison.”**

 So you see, God gives us directions and promises for our survival and peace of mind in this world of sin. God lays out for us certain guidelines for making this world a pleasant journey. Let me share with you some of those guidelines.

 The first guideline is found in the words before us. We shared this: **“I have learned to be content in any circumstances in which I find myself. I know what it is to live in humble circumstances, and I know what it is to have more than enough. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, while being full or hungry, while having plenty or not enough. I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.”** There is our first guide in life. Learn to lead on God, his strength and his promises. Please note that this guideline is there because our young confirmand today, chose a part of this text as her confirmation verse. She chose, **“I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.”** That is exactly where it all starts!

 Of course, in order to lean on God you realize that that will take faith! God tells us **“Store up for yourselves teasures in heaven…and …seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.”** Our God gives us faith as we hear in Romans, **“So then, faith come from hearing the message, and the message comes through the word of Christ.”** If you want your faith to have a God pleasing outlook, then you need to have God working in your life. He does that through the Gospel in word and sacrament. He does that by providing for us pastors and teachers, shepherds to share the truth. And for all those people out there who say they don’t need the church, what will you do with what we heard in our Epistle reading last week? He told us concerning Jesus, **“God also placed all things under his feet and made him the head over everything for the church. The church is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”** If you don’t have church how are you a part of the body of Christ?

 And then there is the issue of repentance and forgiveness. God’s word leads us to see our sins and to repent of our sins. That means that we are sorry and will strive to stop the sins we are involved in. It is an ongoing battle. When you decide your sin is more important than God, then you have a problem. That means you are not standing on the truth and foundation of God. Jesus is not a license for sin. Where there is genuine repentance, then we forgive those who sin against us just as God has forgiven us. Learning about repentance and forgiveness is important for us. But also learning, when you are confronted by sin and there is no repentance, how to apply God’s Word, how to turn the matter over to God. For trusting God’s just judgments is important too.

 The next guidelines are important too, and I say guidelines because it is really a series of promises that are given to us by the Lord. Actually all of our guidelines are important, but some address hang-ups more pointedly than others. This area is one of them. To cover this area, let’s go to our Catechism and what it says to us. We are in the Lord’s Prayer section, the Seventh Petition. Found there are some questions and answers that I believe constitute some of the greatest promises of God to us. Now the first great promise is the about Jesus and the forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation He gives us by grace through faith. Then follow these wonderful words. I will leave it to you to go to your Catechism and look at all the passages there that are the basis of what is said here.

 Under the Seventh Petition, **“But deliver us from evil”** we have the following questions and answers. Q. 368. *What is meant by evil? Answer: By evil is meant all the bad things that are a part of our life on earth as a result of Adam’s fall into sin.”* Question 369: *“How does the evil in the world affect our lives? Answer: “The evil in the world brings many hardships into our lives because it threatens our bodies and souls, property and reputation.”* Question 370: *“What does God do about the evil in the world?”* A three-fold answer is given here that is just the most awesome thing to hear and learn. *Answer: “God keeps evil away from us.” “When God permits evil to come into our lives, he makes it work for our good.” When God permits evil to come into our lives, he strengthens and supports us so that we are able to bear it.”*

 God is with us. God will help us. God will guide us and strengthen us! He does that through His holy Word and through the awesome and uplifting promises He gives us. Like these. I can’t begin to tell you how often God has kept evil away from your lives. When you get to heaven, you ask God about it and He will show you just how He has protected you all your life.

 Now pay attention. Here is a truth of God’s Word. *“When God permits evil to come into our lives.”* There is a truth to grasp. In his all-knowing, present everywhere wisdom, God, may allow evil into your life. He has his purposes and His divine holy will in mind. I can’t say I completely understand it, but I get it. Think of Jesus. The ultimate evil happens to Jesus. Unjustly arrested, tried and crucified. Dying a horrid death and suffering our eternity. You have to admit God “permitted that.” And then you have to admit that it was completely, positively and wonderfully for our eternal good! There it is. If God permits evil into our lives it is for our good! He can make it serve his purpose of our eternal life. Just as awesome is the fact that if He permits this evil, God then promises to strengthen us so that we are able to bear up under it. I tell you, these promises of our God are totally awesome. There is just nothing to fear when God is on our side! No matter what, you trust God. Cling to his promises. Use His strength and goodness and no matter what the world throws at you, there will come a time in God’s eternal kingdom when we will laugh at what are really “momentary light troubles” in this world. God is our wisdom and strength!

 One final guideline please, that is important for us to practice in order to have a God pleasing outlook. This is perhaps the toughest for us, especially if it is already a nasty habit of our lives. Our Savior tells us in Matthew (6:25) **“For this reason I tell you, do not worry about your life…”** There is nothing in this world worse than getting ourselves all worked up into a lather that to adopt the habit of sitting and worrying. It accomplishes nothing. It doesn’t make you feel better. It doesn’t change anything. Actually all it can do is make you sick and apprehensive, scared of life. No wonder Jesus says, **“Don’t worry.”**

 The key to all of this is Jesus and His redemptive work. To know the truth of sin and God’s Savior Jesus. To cling to God’s truth in His Word and thus in Jesus. To put into practice the issues of repentance, forgiveness, God’s grace and mercy, and so many other wonders of our Christian faith. Know Jesus. Practice your faith in Jesus. He is our strength! God help you in this. Amen.