

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Redeemer. Amen. They are called first world problems and they make you wince. They are the petty complaints that slide from the mouths of people who don't really have that much to complain about. The well-fed, soundly housed, comfortably income people who have lost their perspective on life. The socials are full of them. Had to wake up early for the ironing lady to come and cats lock, she still isn't here. Peeling pomegranates has to be one of the most painstaking tasks in the world. Queue at Sainsbury's salad bar for fifteen minutes to find they had no giant couscous. To say this has ruined my Monday would be an understatement. Have a paper cut on my index finger. Every tweet is agony, but I persist bravely. I just had a cup of tea with soy milk. It was one of the worst decisions I've ever made in my life Now, there's only one thing worse than hearing other people complain about their first world problems, and that's hearing myself do it. Uh, and I do. Uh, I, I lament problems that are so trivial that you have to be in the top half a dozen percent of the world's richest people to even have that problem. Uh, like the other day, I complained, uh, that, uh, the Bluetooth in my car takes a whole minute to connect to the podcast on my phone. Seriously? This is what I've become? "Rejoice in the Lord always," says Paul in today's epistle reading. Easy for him to say. His free offer of Apple TV never ran out. "The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but let your requests be made known to God, and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus," says Paul. Sure, but he never had to pay an extra \$200 a year for his car tags for having an electric vehicle like I do Whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things, urges Paul. Easy for him to say. He didn't have to deal with that badly repaired pothole on Decatur Street on his commute to work There are two types of people in the world. One finds obeying Paul and rejoicing in the Lord impossible. The other finds it painfully difficult, but through prayer and determination, they sometimes succeed There are two types of people in the world. One has a mindset of scarcity and the other an attitude of abundance. There are two types of people in the world, those with small vision and fearful hearts who can

only see what they lack, and those with fizzy faith and hungry hope who dream of what is possible. Those who look at their own resources and conclude, correctly as it happens, that they don't have what it takes to make it through, but stay there, and those who go on from there to embrace the resources of God and say, "Why not?" If you listen carefully, you can hear the voices of scarcity or what Brian McLaren calls the tyranny of not enough. Some of those voices come from people around us and some from within us. My faith is so puny, my prayer life so sick. I don't think I can ever please God or be of any use to him. Close my spirit. There's not enough to go around. My church doesn't have enough money. We need to give less for mission, withhold our parish share, scale back our programs. Close the hole in the budget. There's not enough to go around. My heart is so broken. My tears are so many. My hope is so shattered. My vision so dead. I can never forgive, never dream, never thrive. Close my heart. There's not enough to go around. My life is so stressed, my mental resources so strained, my physical strength so drained. I don't have what I need to get through today. Close the world. There's not enough to go around. My cross is too heavy, my illness so crushing, my loss overwhelming, my relationship beyond broken. Close my eyes. There's not enough to go around. Do you have enough time to do whatever you need to do this week? Yes. Do you have enough energy to give your attention to the person who needs you this afternoon? Yes. Do you have enough patience to sit in another traffic jam, stand in another post office queue, cope with a noisy child for another five minutes? Yes, and yes, and yes. I, I say confidently on your behalf, yes, because scripture tells me so. The Apostle Peter says in his second letter, "God's divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness." Has given, past tense, everything we need for our lives. "God's divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness, so rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I say rejoice." You see, if we view God's resources as scarce, then we will fret. If our hearts are focused on what we lack instead of what we have, then we will most certainly worry. When we see others enjoying things that we think we deserve, we will resent them. There's only so much money to go around, only so much happiness, only so much love, only so much God. If other people are enjoying these things, then there's less available for me. If there's not enough of God's blessing to go around, then we would be

right to compete for God's love, to fight for material things, to hoard what we have, to be defensive, to be suspicious of other people, to reject the outsider, to close ranks, to shun risk, to settle for what we have and dedicate our energy to making sure no one else shares in it. What small minds, minuscule hearts, deformed and suffering spirits we endure when we focus on what we lack instead of rejoicing in what we have. I read some advice about taking risks. It said, "Don't ride in automobiles. They cause 20% of all fatal accidents. Do not stay at home. 17% of all accidents occur in the home. Do not walk on the street or sidewalk. 14% of accidents occur to pedestrians. Do not travel by air, rail, or water. 16% of all accidents happen on these. However, only 0.001% of all reported deaths occur in church." You've made a wise decision this morning Rejoice in the Lord always: I say it again, Rejoice Now, if you are one of those people who thinks that God's commandments are designed to make us miserable, then pin your ears back. God's command is this: rejoice. Why? He carries on. Because the Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. But there's more. Dr. Paul Psych D drops into his letter a prescription for one of the most effective and dynamic cures for all manner of human frailties. Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things and the peace of God will be with you It's all about where we are looking. My eyes are often on the chaos. My ears are attuned to the voices of despair and the boasts of dishonesty. I focus on the reason to be miserable and the causes of doubt. I fix my eyes on things I lack. Some of those things belong to other people. Some are beyond my ability to buy. Some are denied me because I have responsibilities to work and serve and love. And this, I'm convinced, is the single greatest cause of my unhappiness, my wishful thinking, my resentment, my envy, my feelings of inadequacy, and my fear of the future. Taking my eyes off God, rejecting Paul's glorious invitation to focus on the beautiful, the true, the noble, the just, the honorable, the pure, and the commendable. If we take this instruction seriously, we will make an inventory on what we allow our minds to focus on,

and where we set our eyes, and where we attune our ears. Uh, I've done this, and for the last four years, I have cut cable news channels. I'm not saying you should, just that I should. Because when I ca- wa- watch na- cable news, I want to become a worse person. I feel anger, fear, and anxiety. I want to look at my neighbor with suspicion. I feel the urge to hate one political party or the other, whichever one it is, because they are bad people, and they intend to do harm. But when I hear the words of Jesus, I want to be a better person. When I consume quality art on TV or at the cinema, I want to be a better person. Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things, and the God of peace will be with you. I've just actually rewritten that, uh, in the negative. Whatever is false, whatever is degrading, whatever is unfair, whatever is salacious, whatever is mean, whatever is terrifying, if there is anything infuriating or worthy of ignoring, think about these things, and the God of peace will be closed off to you. Are our eyes on things we don't have or on things we do have? You see, if we are forever focused on the things we lack, then we will be restless. We'll be hungry for more, maybe striving too hard or reaching beyond our limits to possess something that is forever just out of our grasp. And so may you this week rejoice in the Lord. May your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. May you not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving make your requests known to God. And may whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, make sure you think about those things. Amen