



“Stand a Little Taller”

Philippians 4:4-13

October 11, 2026

Rev. Amy Miracle

Broad Street Presbyterian Church

Columbus, Ohio

Finally, beloved, 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.

This is my stand taller passage. I hear these words and I find myself standing taller. Sitting differently in my chair. My back gets straighter. My shoulders go back a little bit. It's my body's response to inspiration and challenge.

What is it about this passage? I cannot hear it without wanting to do better, to be better, to narrow the gap between my intentions and my actions. This passage inspires me. Couldn't we all benefit from studying this passage? Living this passage?

I need to be honest here. I have a long and growing list of people who could do better, who should do better. In recent weeks that list has grown. I know I'm not the only one who has taken in the news story about what happened on the Cornell Campus and thought: No, no, no, no, no, no. How? What is wrong with people? Thank God I'm not like that. Thank God we are not like that.

I have a long list of people who could do better, who should do better. Do you have such a list? We could spend more than the time allotted for the sermon sharing all of the people out there who could benefit from some of the honor and truth and excellence that is referenced in this passage. I can feel my energy rising at the thought of such a conversation.

We are not going to do that.

That's not what Paul, the author of the letter to the Philippians, wants us to do. I think Paul is familiar with the temptation we all have to assess and judge the actions of others. I think he knows how satisfying it is to write off people we have never met. But that is not what these words are intended to do. These words are intended to work in us. For us to examine the gap between values and actions that lives in us. Paul doesn't invite us to have more clarity about how other people should do better but rather how we can do better.

Paul invites us to think on these things. What helps you think on these things? Or maybe better put, who helps you think about these things?

Which brings me to John Glenn. Ten years ago, I had the great honor of officiating at his memorial service.

For a kid who grew up in Ohio and who woke up in the middle of the night to watch rocket launches and moon landings and inhaled everything related to the space program, this was a dream come true, the high point of my professional career.

It was my suggestion to include this passage from Philippians. Annie Glenn and her two kids agreed with my recommendation. This is part of what I said in that service.

Senator Glenn's legacy is available to all of us. For one who traveled so far, who soared so high, he never left the rest of us behind. He always took us with him.

Earlier this week I asked Mrs. Glenn about her husband's faith. She answered, "We didn't talk about it much because it was in us." The Glenn's are of a generation that rarely spoke about their faith. They lived it. Faith got in John Glenn at a young age and it took root.

He had a deep, life-long connection to God and to the church. That connection shaped the trajectory of his years, giving him the courage to dare greatly and the wisdom to live humbly. He knew – in life and in death – he belonged to God.

Senator Glenn did something that is rarely done. I'm not talking about any of the accomplishments that have been mentioned today. The rare thing that he did was that he lived a life that fully reflected his deepest values. His priorities were in his bloodstream; his values embedded in every synapse of his brain.

That's why the Philippians passage is so appropriate. His life embodies these words of scripture.

Finally, beloved, 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. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in [John Glenn], and the God of peace will be with you."

What I didn't say that day was that John Glenn was so very, very Presbyterian. Raised in a Presbyterian church, went to a Presbyterian college. When he was a senator, he was an elder in his Presbyterian church in Washington D.C.

For so many reasons, John Glenn is one of my Philippians 4 people. People whose lives inspire me. Delight me. Challenge me.

It's easy to see someone like John Glenn as perfect, the life he lived unattainable because he was made of the right stuff and we are not. In the planning of the memorial service, I had the opportunity to spend time with John Glenn's adult children. And guess what? He was not a perfect father. John Glenn was flawed, complex, human.

But still, a bona fide national hero may be setting the bar a little high.

So, let me tell you about another of my Philippians 4 people. He wasn't famous. He didn't do anything that got his name in the paper. He served in the Army as a First Lieutenant during the Korean War. He worked for 48 years for a public utility. He was married for almost 65 years. He loved the Cincinnati Symphony and had a fondness for Rosemary Clooney and Bloody Mary's. He went to the inaugural

game of the Cincinnati Bengals and never lost faith in them. He enjoyed fishing, spring training, and Arizona wildflowers. A lifelong learner, he donated his body to a medical school, wishing to be as useful and helpful in death as he was in life. He was the kindest person I have ever met.

I know all of this because this man was my dad. Just like John Glenn, he lived a life in which there appeared to be a smaller gap between his values and his actions. Thinking about my dad not only brings a smile to my face, but it makes me stand a little taller, makes me want to be a little kinder, have a bit more patience, just generally do better.

And can you guess what one of the readings was at my dad's memorial service? Philippians 4.

I invite you to take a moment and think of one of your Philippians 4 people – someone who inspires you and challenges you to do better.

Today, we give thanks to God for such folks.

As I said earlier, I love this passage. But I need to be honest. There are a few risks in engaging this passage. One is to use it to judge others. It is very hard not to do that. Very difficult to avoid. The other risk is to judge ourselves too harshly. I can't possibly live up to these ideals of excellence and truthfulness and integrity so why bother? This is where grace comes in. All of us fall short. For the best among us, there is still a gap between our intentions and our actions. God knows that. And just as God invites us to do a little better, God loves, accepts, and forgives us. That's really important to remember.

I want to share one more concern I have about this passage. All of this striving to do better, I'm not sure it sounds like all that much fun. It seems if we are to be our best selves, we need to be earnest and serious and work hard and study up for what's going to be on the test and who has time for frivolity and fun when you live a life so full of integrity and purpose and you know what Paul has to say to that?

That is completely wrong. Striving for such a life contains so much joy. This seeking to do better, this narrowing of the gap between our intentions and our actions brings joy to us and to the world. In today's passage, the word joy keeps popping up. Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I say rejoice. Doing better. Being better is connected to joy.

- The quiet joy I feel when I think about my dad.
- The warm feeling we get when we have done something that makes someone else's life a little easier or a little less lonely.
- It's that deep sense of satisfaction when we show up for others in our community.

I want you to hear Paul's words one more time. Not as judgment on others or judgment on ourselves. But as an invitation to be better. To do better. To lean into the quiet joy of living a life that more fully aligns with our deepest values. As you hear these words, you may find yourselves sitting a little taller in your seat.

Finally, beloved, 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.

Amen.