

Second Sunday of Advent.

December 6, 2020

Philippians 1:2-11:

“Where Our Partnership Takes Us”

- I. Partakers of Grace in the Good and Bad Times.
- II. Love with Knowledge and Discernment.
- III. Ready for the Day of Christ.

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Philippians 1:2-11

Dear Friends in Christ,

Please listen to this Word of the Lord that Paul wrote to Titus regarding what we have in Christ Jesus:

(we are) "waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works." (Titus 2:13,14)

We have been redeemed; purchased from death and hell that were the result of sin - the lawlessness that dwells in our flesh. You know that. The Scriptures say, "the blood of Jesus...cleanses us from all sin." (1 Jn. 1:7) As a result, and again as Scriptures say, we are "A people for his own possession who are zealous for good works." He owns us! Praise God! For the child of God, life is not about - it cannot be about - "It's my life and I'll live it as I please!" That is rebellion! Again, "we are a people for his own possession."

The Scriptures say, "For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another." (Rom. 12:4,5) *Individually - members - of one another.* We belong to God through faith in Christ and, consequently, we belong to one another. You see, Jesus coming into our lives has changed everything. Our overriding theme, ***It's Good To Be Who We Are***, includes how we see our walk together through this world. This Second Sunday of Advent we're looking at . . .

WHERE OUR PARTNERSHIP TAKES US

I. Partakers of Grace in the Good and Bad Times.

Paul wrote The Epistle to the Philippians from Rome while in prison for the faith. The date was around 60 A. D. Here are verses 3-7 of our text:

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about you, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

This is quite insightful in a wonderful way. Paul was in prison and, yet, expresses great joy because of his relationship to the Christians at Philippi beginning with the Holy Spirit using him to form the congregation. Commentator Harlyn Kuschel writes:

Whenever he remembered the Philippians, Paul must have remembered his imprisonment in Philippi, the miraculous midnight deliverance the Lord had granted to Silas and to him, and the subsequent conversion of the jailer and his family. Paul must have remembered how the Philippians had generously sent him a gift to support his gospel work soon after he had left their city, and he must have thought about all the glowing reports he had received about the Philippians' faith, love, and loyalty to the gospel. (Harold J. Kuschel, "The People's Bible," *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Second Edition, 2000, P. 18)

If you know the history of Paul's journeys then you know they were filled with many wonderful and many very ugly moments. For most Christians of this day the only remembrance of Philippi would be the horror of being thrown in prison for proclaiming the love of God in Christ. But, you see, as Paul says,

"you are all partakers with me of grace". The real horror of existence would be to have X number of years of worldly comfort and safety then die and enter eternal wailing and gnashing of teeth; unending burning and darkness!. We rejoice in the mutual comfort and consolation of knowing that we are together in the journey to eternal life, regardless of the struggles here.

II. Love with Knowledge and Discernment.

Paul goes on to say:

For God is my witness, how I yearn for you with the affection of Christ Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment... (vv.8,9)

Would not his prayer for the Philippians be the same for us as we battle with Satan and the demons of hell who want to destroy the Gospel? He begins, "...it is my prayer that your love may abound...". The love is the agape love. And agape love has been defined as "the love of true knowledge and understanding coupled with corresponding purpose." (Lenski, "Interpretation of Galatians, Ephesians and Philippians," p. 717)

"Love of true knowledge and understanding" is knowledge of the Word that promises forgiveness and eternal life through faith in Christ. It understands God's love for the unlovable, the undeserving - us - all people. It's understanding the frailty and helplessness of others, as well as each other. It's what we will once again see in our celebration of the birth of Christ: the fullness of Agape Love lying in the Manger, willing to travel the road to the Cross for everyone.

Everything we've considered here is rooted in the Scriptural truths and understanding of "while we were still sinners Christ died for us" and "while we were enemies we were reconciled to God" (Rom. 5:8b,10a) Since He did that for us, we are to understand others in the same light.

III. Ready for the Day of Christ.

Paul then concludes his thanksgiving and prayer for the Christians at Philippi and the Christians here with this: "...so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God." (vv. 10,11) I suspect the words "and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness" give each of us reason to stop and think.

We are "pure and blameless" only through faith in Christ. Paul writes, "For in it (in the gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'" (Rom. 1:17). Again, only through faith in Christ does God grant pardon for all sin and see us as pure and blameless. The "fruit of faith" are works that give evidence of faith. James writes, "So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead." (Jms. 2:17) As you know, James is not saying that works pay for sin or earn our way to heaven. They are the evidence of faith and the response of a grateful heart.

And we would do well to remember these words of our Lord Jesus: "You are the light of the world...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (Mat. 5:14a,16) The light we reflect is the result of faith. The light - the good works - fulfills what our text calls us to do: "that you may approve what is excellent." We show what is God pleasing.

All we have considered is where our partnership in the gospel takes us. We travel this road together. We are mutually strengthened by the grace of God in good times and bad times. As difficult as it might appear, we extend the love of God in Christ to all.

If you don't mind, I would ask you to hear commentator Harold Kuschel's words here. They're most appropriate:

As they grow in mature Christian love that is coupled with knowledge and depth of insight, believers will be able to make correct decisions. They will be able to evaluate the various teachings and philosophies that confront them in their lives and make God-pleasing, moral choices. They will grow in their ability to live the Christianity they profess. When the great day of Christ's return comes, and the true character of everyone's heart and life is revealed, their lives will be acknowledged by the Lord as lives filled with fruits of faith, and Christ will be truly honored through them. (Kuschel, p. 22)

Our partnership in the Gospel impresses upon us the Advent journey that not only prepares us to meet our precious Lord and Savior at the Manger, but also prepares us to meet Him on that glorious Day of His return. *It's Good To Be Who We Are!* It's the best!

Amen!

Pastor Bill Abbott