



Summer 2016 Walking Through Philippians

Sermon Transcript
August 21, 2016

Paul's Passions: People, Prayer, Discipleship
Philippians 4:2-9

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on August 21, 2016 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Rev. Daniel Warriner. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio copy of the sermon on CD is available by request at (860) 563-8286. An audio version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com.

Sermon Text

Philippians 4:2-9

² I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.

³ Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.

⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand;

⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

⁹ What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me-- practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Introduction

When my wife's grandfather was pastor of our church back in the 1970s. I have heard stories that when her grandfather would preach, he would sometimes begin his messages with the question, "Have I told you lately that I love you?" It's a sweet reminder that the person standing behind this pulpit should example the love of Christ. As I was preparing for today and was reading the words of Paul to the Philippians, I couldn't help but imagine Paul caringly writing his letter and thinking to himself, "Have I told them lately that I love them?" The entire tone of the letter is one of appreciation and gratefulness in addition to any admonition he provides is couched in his gratitude.

Often in the New Testament epistles, at the close of the letter there is a shift as the letter closes. The line of thought moves into summary mode. It ties together the main points of the letter and adds any final thoughts that the author is conveying. In Philippians 4:2-9, Paul is beginning to sum up his letter to the church of Philippi and it's where his main themes resurface. I see three major themes in the verses we will be looking at today. Paul stresses the importance of having a passion for people, for prayer, and for discipleship.

Passion for People (Verses 2 and 3)

On July 17th John Leonetti taught us a word in Greek. That word is “soonathleo” which means to strive or toil alongside with someone. It reappears in 4:3 and is translated “to labor side by side.” John and I were talking about this word before he preached so for the rest of this point I have to credit to him. It’s a very rare word inside of the Bible. It’s actually only used twice and it’s only within Philippians. The first time it is used, is in Philippians 1:27. Paul is commending the Philippians to live a life worthy of the Gospel by striving together whether in suffering and conflict with unity and humility.

The second time it is used is in Philippians 4:3. This verse specifically addresses conflict between Euodia and Syntyche. Paul wants to help them agree in the Lord because they have worked alongside him or “soonathleo”-ed by his side in the gospel! And he reminds them that their names are already in the book of life. In other words, Paul reminds them that they have been brought into the family of God. That family unity is an incentive to work together into resolution of whatever was going on between them. What I think is interesting and worth pointing out here is that Paul is the only Biblical writer to use this word – and he uses it twice! He uses it to begin the letter and to end the letter. So, I wonder if, in essence Paul is drawing his letter to a close by going back to what he first talks about. This is called an *inclusio*, tying together the first and the last things mentioned in the letter. And “soonathleo” isn’t the only theme he draws back together at the end of the letter. It is a way to draw attention to the selected important themes we should pay attention to. So Paul, in his great vocabulary uses this rare word to highlight how important it is to labor together in the Gospel and to seek resolutions to our conflicts with fellow believers.

I mean, you know how it happens. Euodia made chili for the church picnic and she overheard Syntyche say how her chili is much better and spicier than Euodia’s. Then, Syntyche was helping out at the How Food Pantry and Euodia didn’t show up to help and the next week they got in an argument over their children between the services at the “Coffee And...” and now their families aren’t talking to each other. And I’m using the example of women because of the verse, but of course guys have conflicts, too. It’s conflict - It happens and it can be anywhere.

Though not good in and of itself, conflict is good in that it produces good things. If our church didn’t have conflict, it would actually be a really bad sign. Living and loving others this broken world will produce conflict. Not having conflict is a sign that we aren’t being our authentic broken selves with each other. In fact, you’ve probably well acquainted with conflict if you’ve been part of a community group, by getting people together in close contact you are certain to get friction which leads to conflict and

confrontations. That's completely normal! I imagine two magnets, when our lives are pressed together there is a resistive force in that process. When lives are pressed together, our broken, sinful nature actually resists intimacy. And by resisting intimacy, resisting being honest and humbly communicating with each other, we resist reaching resolution "in the Lord" and our striving together, our fellowship remains immature, underdeveloped, or becomes bitter and a continued source of contempt.

Paul entreats them to see past the differences or disagreement in order that they may resolve their conflict in the Lord, with the mind of Christ. This is no small feat, as anyone who has ever had conflict would tell you. But I think our love for each other and for God gives us powerful motivation to seek these resolutions. Even if they don't see eye to eye on something, they can reach a peaceable resolution in the Lord as a means to moving past a potentially divisive obstacle in their church.

Paul doesn't go into any detail here as to how the leadership in Philippi should plan how they are to help Euodia and Syntyche agree in the Lord. Earlier Paul describes the humility of Christ emptying himself for our interest and recommends we follow his example to act in unity and humility even to the point of death. So perhaps he has already laid a framework for how they might walk through the complicated business of conflict resolution in the Lord. Putting our personal agenda, baggage, or emotional issues aside for the sake of reaching a better understanding. He encourages them to do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit and looking out for the interest of others before their own. Paul stresses the importance of resolving their conflict in chapter 4, but the pattern of how they ought to walk through these skirmishes is patterned in the example of Christ.

I think it is beyond of the scope of this message to address conflict resolution, but I just want to add how vital it is to remain respectful and open during these confrontations, treating others the way you would want to be treated. Conflict resolution "in the Lord" leads to the type of intimate relationships Paul is talking about. Paul cares about the two women because his deep affection for them. He cares about their wellbeing within the Body of Christ – a community that will last for eternity. Their conflict will only last so long before they stand before Jesus and give their account. Long past their struggle lasts, they will be in the presence of God forever. Paul is passionate about the conflict of these two women because he has a deep and lasting commitment to them. In short, he loves them. He is committed to their emotional and spiritual health and maturity in Christ. A commitment that isn't just emotional, but flows out of his prayerful attitude toward the churches that he cares so deeply about. The caliber of the love we show is a witness to depth of love God has shown us. It speaks to the watching world that God is at work in our relationships. If God ordains for us to suffer and that suffering produces

fruit in us (Philippians 1:29), then perhaps he ordains relationships to have conflict that produces some kind of fruit in our lives. We can imitate Paul and have a passion for people to resolve conflict and agree in the Lord.

As a plug, Stephen Ministry provides training and support for those struggling with conflict and those wanting to learn to better navigate conflict with more wisdom from a Christian perspective.

Another plug would be to advertise the Sunday morning community I will be leading in the fall. It is called Emotionally Healthy Spirituality. The course is designed to get a group together to process emotional health to aid our spiritual growth. It provides a means of unearthing issues of the heart that cause a lack of intimacy with God and others. The effects of those issues can actively cause conflict in our lives. So keep that in mind if that is of concern in your heart and mind today.

Passion for Prayer (Verses 4 - 7)

As we look at verses 4-7 of Philippians 4, we see that Paul is also passionate about how this new life in Christ is manifested in our lives. Paul is passionate about our transformation in the Gospel – and we best participate in that change and allowing the Holy Spirit change us - when we pray. Paul gives us some specific aspects of prayer that he shares with the Philippian church.

Verse 4 begins, *“⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand;”* This is not an encouragement to always be happy, Paul is saying to always have joy in the Lord. He encourages the Philippian believers, and I believe us as well, to understand the Gospel to the extent that it causes us to experience joy – an intentional delight and thankfulness to what Jesus has done through his life and death. A righteousness not my own but imputed to me because of his work – not mine. Not because of anything I have to DO, but because of what Jesus has DONE, I can rejoice! Now I ask you this, can we live a life worthy of the Gospel and allow it to bring us joy, if we do not understand the Gospel? If we do not understand “The Good News” then how can we rejoice? Let us be people who continually ask God for a new and deeper appreciation of God’s love in our lives. Surely, if we can support each other to agree in the Lord, we can commend each other to have joy in the Lord.

The word translated “reasonableness” has many definitions. In five out of 10 translations I looked in, the same word was translated as gentleness and contrasted with violent behavior. So his encouragement stands to let our gentle and reasonable

behavior be known to everyone. The reason we should let it be known is because the Lord is at hand. God is near us and among us! And the knowledge that God is in our midst reminding us that we are his sons and daughters. And it is actively transforming us away from our sin nature and transforming us into who we are in Christ. This is a light to those outside of Christ. This is a message to the world and a witness that our God lives and actively lives within us. This causes us to rejoice!

Verse 6 and 7 declares “*6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*” Paul’s encouragement is to not be anxious or concerned about our daily care. And this is a command echoed throughout the whole of Scripture. This another one of the themes that Paul repeats twice in his letter: once in Philippians 2:20 where Paul describes Timothy as “genuinely concerned” for the welfare of the Philippians. And it is repeated with the exhortation to cast our cares upon God’s love which looks out for our best interests so that his peace can protect our hearts.

We are to be a people who live our lives with the deep security of knowing God loves us and not sees our daily needs but will take an active position to care for us. By prayer and supplication with thanksgiving. All three of these points are technically styles of prayer. By prayer we fix our eyes afresh on the provision of God and his faithfulness to father us and protect us despite what a situation looks or feels like to us at first blush.

And by collaborating with God in this way, in continual prayer, we can develop a confidence that God will care for our needs. When I feel responsible for doing God’s work, this can give momentum to me feeling anxiety. Whereas if I trust in God in the face of my need, bringing it to him for what only he can do, then this is a sign that I trust God, I remember his faithfulness to do what only he can do in my circumstances. And it’s a good reminder that my story is about him.

The experience can and will cause peace from God to be present in our hearts and minds through Jesus Christ. It will be beyond our understanding in some ways, but not entirely. This means that peace from God will transcend what we will be fully able to apprehend in our minds. I imagine trying to scoop up the vast proportions of Niagara Falls of God’s peace in the Dixie cup of my finite and limited heart and mind. It just can’t all fit in there. It surpasses my comprehension. As we remember the Gospel, peace from God was purchased by the sinless life and death of Jesus which brought us peace between us and God when we place our trust in Christ. This peace that we experience is more than a feeling, it is an assurance of being kept in Him from the beginning of our faith journey until Jesus comes again to claim us as his own. It’s the assurance of being brought into a family relationship that will never end but will only

grow throughout your life. We participate in this growth by having a passion for prayer.

Passion for Discipleship (Verses 8 and 9)

Paul is no stranger to relationships. He describes discipleship as practicing what you have learned and received and heard in another person. Upon our entrance into the family of faith, we are in essence bound to each other. Euodia and Syntyche should have the commitment to work out their issues in light of an eternity together. Speaking locally, our passion as a church has been to commit grow within community groups. Small assemblies of people who desire to live life together. This together-ness is a response to the oft-repeated call of Scripture for community. I'm a big fan of the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer. I like how he describes Christian community when he says "Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate." It's a reality of this Christian life and we were created to live in relationship with others. Without community we endanger our spiritual and physical lives.

The Gospel is the proclamation of God's love through the Good News of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God has given us the ministry of discipleship to use us in the lives of those around us to shape them into the image of Christ. The power in a community is the power of influencing others. The sobering thought is that this goes for better or for worse. I think the expression fits that says, 'values are better caught than taught.' We easily pick up what we value, behaviors, habits, outlooks of life from those around us.

Imitate others in the family of faith as they imitate Christ. This is a common recommendation from the Biblical writers. Paul has already told us in Philippians 3:17 to imitate him and those who walk or live according to the example set before them. It's found from Paul in 2 Thessalonians, it's in Hebrews, and it appears in 3 John, in addition to 3:17 which was talked about last week. Not only do we need to cherish relationships with people who have walked this Christian walk longer than us, but we need to be people who are wisely growing and becoming people to imitate in Christ.

I'm really intrigued by the rich Christian tradition of discipleship. Many cultures and traditions have surprising and inspiring ways of making disciples. Around here when we say we make disciples, we do so through worship, community, and service. And don't forget to play together, too! While I was in seminary, some of my closest friends and most intimate moments were from a church softball team. So, if you're interested in a softball team – lets connect!

I've said before that I work in hospice with many older adults at the end of life. I'm interested in how our Christian lives continue to develop as we age. It is such a different experience to talk to someone at the end of their life who has been walking with Christ for decades. And it's such a different range of emotions for me when a person refuses to bow their knee before God. Some Christians have told me, almost with a shade of guilt in their voice, that are surprised they aren't more scared of death. I have said to them, "Why would you be afraid of death? You died decades ago when you laid down your life to Jesus and you've been preparing for eternity since then, and now you're almost there."

Those who have been walking with Christ share a gift when then engage in community to testify of God's faithfulness and grace and love over the course of a lifetime. So if you've been walking with the Lord for many a year, that's an incredibly valuable gift that you have the opportunity to share within our church. The texture of your unique spiritual life and the wisdom God has put in you is beyond value. We need the collaboration of all the saints - whether you've been a saint for just a day, or whether you laid down your life to Christ over 50 years ago, you have much life to share. As an essential element of our faith, we need to connect with mentors or someone down the road of faith who is consistently living a life worthy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

We have been walking through Paul's letter to the Philippians. We have been privy to his intimate communications to his beloved flock in Philippi. We should be passionate about what Paul is passionate about. From Philippians 4:2-9 we see that Paul is passionate about People, Prayer, and Discipleship. Let these priorities kindle a passionate fire of love in us and we won't hesitate to share that love with those around us. We will look for opportunities to grow in relationships, grow in our prayers, and grow in how we imitate those along the road of faith. And may we communicate that affection in Christ by asking, "Have I told you today that I love you?"

D. A. Carson, [A Call to Spiritual Formation](#) (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006). See Chapter 5 for other examples of Paul's prayers for people.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, [Life Together](#) (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1954) 30.

Jared C. Wilson, "I Hope I Die Before I Get Old" The Gospel Coalition Blog, October 16, 2013 <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/gospeldrivenchurch/2013/10/16/i-hope-i-die-before-i-get-old/>

© by Rev. Daniel Warriner - All rights reserved