

A sermon preached at Eternal Love Lutheran Church, Appleton, WI, by Pastor Michael Johnson on July 18, 2010

Grace and peace

Philippians 1:2-8

² *Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

³ *I thank my God every time I remember you.* ⁴ *In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy* ⁵ *because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,* ⁶ *being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

⁷ *It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me.* ⁸ *God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.* ¹

This is a busy, joyous month for Eternal Love. The installation last week was a special point in the congregation's history and VBS kicks off tomorrow already! Yet for many in the area, and possibly for some of you, it has been a rough month as well. A recent tornado ravaged Eagle and Muskego. It came within 15 yards of our grandparents' house. The news has been dominated by the BP oil spill for at least a month. And reports are coming in that the recovery is stalling. For many, it's been a long month. I'm sure many of you are struggling with hard times right now. Perhaps you're financially strapped and dreading to see your electric bill. I know many people that just want some peace and quiet in these hard times? When are the happy days coming? Today we have reminder from the apostle Paul that while the world might seem chaotic, you and I have peace right now. Today we're concentrating on Philippians 1:2-8.

(v.2)

Paul in his letter to the church in Philippi writes: "*grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*" Grace and peace. There's not much nicer way to greet a fellow Christian. Grace is God's unending love for us that we don't deserve at all. Its Old Testament equivalent is hesed, meaning mercy – compassion for someone who doesn't deserve it. God loves you not for anything you have done or deserved – quite frankly God loves you in spite of you and your unworthiness, but simply because he loves you.

And peace to you. Paul here isn't wishing or granting a complete absence of problems from the Philippians' lives. He's not saying that if you're a Christian your life should be free from health issues and you should be rich. No, Christians aren't guaranteed to have a perfect life free from health

The Holy Bible : New International Version. 1996 (electronic ed.) (Php 1:2–8). Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

problems and rolling in the dough. Yes, there actually *are* going to be problems in your lives as Christians. Life will be tough sometimes. Families will have problems, people will die, but through it all, you have a constant that you can always count on. Christ promised to be with you no matter what happens, holding you up. Christ died for you, you're going to heaven. That's true peace, being able to stand amidst a sea of chaos and being at peace because you know that you have a loving God in heaven that died for you and will make all things turn out for your good. That's true peace. Perhaps, though, you might think that it was easy for Paul to start off his letter to the Philippians this way because he knew them. In fact, they held a special place in his heart. I haven't even met many of you yet. But this same pastor, Paul, wrote a letter to the church in Rome – a place he hadn't even been yet and do you know how he started his letter? "*Grace and peace*" to you. The grace and peace we share as Christians is a bond that supersedes a mere friendship.

And because of that peace we have through Christ, we all can call God our Father. We're all united together as a family in Christ. There's a beautiful connection and bond that Christians share in faith. Don't take that for granted, it's a beautiful gift of Christ.

(v.3-4)

Paul writes "*I thank God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy.*" We can observe a few things from this verse. First, Paul remembers his fellow believers as part of his regular prayer life. The verb that says I thank God implies that he continuously thanks God for the Philippians. He says he always thanks God for them in all his prayers. Paul prayed for the Philippians all the time, both in the good times and the bad.

Second, when Paul remembers his fellow Christians, he thanks God for them. He doesn't complain about how they so often mess up and problems they have. He thanks God for them. Finally, just remembering his fellow Christians, gives Paul genuine Christian joy. And this is my promise to you as well. As your pastor, I will continually hold you in my prayers. When times are rough and you need someone to pray for you; and I will be there thanking God with you in moments of celebration. You have – and always will – cause me joy when I think of you. But what exactly gives Paul joy?

(v.5)

Well in verse five Paul says he prays with joy "*because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.*" Paul prays with joy because of the Philippians' partnership in the gospel. The word translated "partnership" is *κοινωνία*. It means "communion" or having a "share in." I read somewhere a good definition for it somewhere that was a bit of a mouth full: *κοινωνία* is "a close relationship or association which may involve having, receiving or giving a share of something." In the New Testament, the word *κοινωνία* is often used to talk about the bond that we have with God and other Christians through faith. To say that we are sharing *κοινωνία* with each other is to say that we share the same faith. You and I are one in faith. It's the same word that the Bible uses when it talks about the Lord's Supper. When you take communion at a church, you're saying that you have a share in what that church teaches. You believe the same thing; you have a partnership in their teaching. You're two peas from the same pod. That's why we encourage all of you to only take communion here if you know what this church teaches. Because, when you commune at a church, what you're saying is: "I put my stamp of approval on this church, I believe what they teach." And if you don't know what this church teaches, I encourage you to find out what it teaches. Just talk me or Pastor Balza and we will be happy to set up a time when we can discuss what the Bible and we teach. We want to have that partnership with you. We just want you to know what you're joining in.

Now Paul talks about their partnership from the first day until now. What's he talking about, especially when he says from the first day? Well when Paul arrived in Philippi, it was a Roman colony, a very important city; its citizens had Roman citizenship. Usually when Paul started mission work in a given city, he started preaching at the local synagogue but there wasn't one in Philippi. That means there were very few Jews in Philippi. You needed a certain amount of Jewish males before you were allowed to build a synagogue, so this church was primarily made up of Gentiles.

When Paul starts preaching in Philippi, a woman named Lydia who sells expensive purple cloth comes to faith and invites Paul and his group to make her house his headquarters in Philippi. After preaching for a while, Paul gets imprisoned and God works through extraordinary means and uses an earthquake to give Paul a chance to witness to the jailer – the head of the prison. And that jailer and his whole family come to faith and not only start associating themselves with their former prisoner but help him. These are some wonderful stories of faith that you can read about in Acts 16. I'm sure Paul had all those things in mind when he talked about from the first day until now.

Paul talks about them having a partnership with him all the way up until he wrote his letter. As soon as Paul left Philippi they began supporting him. In fact they were an excellent example of Christian stewardship. I think I just heard a hundred ears prick up there and think "he didn't just say the 's' word did he? They sent the new guy out to talk to us about money!" Let's look at how they had a share in the gospel with Paul. They prayed for Paul and his work while he was away from them. They continued the work of spreading God's Word that Paul had begun there. He only started the congregation; it was up to them to keep it alive, healthy, and growing (with God's blessing of course). And yes, they supported Paul financially. Immediately after Paul left Philippi they sent him a gift to support him and then they sent Paul support even while he was in prison in Rome even though they often had very little to give of themselves.

But why would we want to donate our time and gifts? Well Paul gives us our motivation in his second reason he prays with joy for the Philippians. He prays with joy *"being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."* Paul doesn't say "I thank God because of you and how good you are. He doesn't say that he's confident that the Philippians will continue on the right path they've started. No, Paul knows that the Philippians, left to themselves, could do nothing but fail. Psalm 51 says *"surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."* You and I left to ourselves are dead in the water. There's not one thing we can do – we're born spiritually dead. A dead person can't save themselves. There's absolutely no room for prideful thinking. We haven't attributed to our salvation at all. It's a good thing Paul doesn't focus on us isn't it? It's all about God. God began a good work in us. Before the creation of the world, God picked you to come to faith. Before you were even born, he won your salvation through the perfect life, death, and resurrection of Christ. God brought you to faith, for many of you while you were just a little baby through the waters of baptism. He continues to work in you and through you. He's invested a lot of time and energy into each and every one of you. I think it's safe to say he's not going to just stop caring all of the sudden and abandon you. He has done all of the work. Notice I haven't even once mentioned anything you've done. There's also great comfort in the fact that we don't do anything. It doesn't depend on us and our many faults and weaknesses. God's done everything for us. That's our motivation for serving God.

God has begun a good work in us and will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus – the last day. Sounds a lot like some words from Jesus doesn't it? Jesus said *"surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* No matter what happens in life – natural disasters, people you love letting you

down, or deaths in the family - no matter what happens God will be there with you – helping you through it – completing the good work of creating faith in your heart. God doesn't leave his work half done. God is going to continue to work in you and support you until you're in heaven with him.

So pray and pray often. Paul here shows us that prayer is not just a wishing or hoping. It is an expression of our absolute trust and confidence in God. God will answer your prayers. He's promised it. You know he'll answer them. Even when you don't know if what you're asking for is according to his will, you have the assurance that he'll answer your prayer in whatever way is for your good. So pray and pray with confidence.

(v.7-8)

Paul says *"It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus."* Paul prays with joy because he says *"I have you in my heart."* There's a hymn in which the lyrics start off "How good, Lord, to be here." It is good for Christians to come together in church. It is good for us to come together and to encourage and strengthen each other and to be encouraged. You can see you're not the only one that is here and believes what you believe. Even though Paul was under house arrest in Rome when he wrote this letter, he longed to be with the Philippians. He was with them at heart. Even though we meet together in three different services, we're still one. We're together, joined in one heart for Christ.

And Paul says all of this is because of the love of Christ. Because of his love that motivated him to choose you before time, to come into this world, live a perfect life and die for you before you were even born. That love motivates God to care for you with his grace and take you to heaven where you will have pure peace, forever. Grace and peace. Grace and peace *are* yours through Jesus Christ. Amen