

"CHRIST IS IT, AND SO ARE HIS PEOPLE"
Philippians 4:11-23

Today we conclude our study on the book of Philippians. It has taken the summer months to work our way through it and I have certainly learned a lot, as we have looked at this letter Paul wrote from a prison cell in Rome to the Christians in the church at Philippi, a church that was Paul's "joy and crown." For out of all of his churches, the Philippian Church gave him the least trouble and so we find here a letter that is filled with joy, gratitude, affection and love. The closing section of this letter is a tremendous affirmation as to the sufficiency of Jesus Christ and the support of the people of Christ, one to another.

The reason that Paul wrote this letter, in the first place, was to thank the church for the gift that he had received. When you think about it, the Philippians did not portray what one would see as a standard apostle-church relationship.

The Philippians were his partners: In the Gospel (1:5), in prison and court defense (1:7), in conflict and suffering (1:30), and unlike all the other churches that Paul was associated with, they shared repeatedly in financial support of his ministry (4:15-16). Paul held these Philippian Christians in his heart (1:7), he yearned for them with the affection of Christ (1:8), and he loved and longed for brothers and sisters who were his joy and crown (4:1) (*Interpretation, Philippians*, Fred B. Craddock, p. 76.). But now it is time to close the letter and we find him putting it right out there for this body of believers who have given so much to him. He shares personally, out of the deep storehouse of Paul's love and appreciation for these fellow laborers for Christ. Twice before he has referred to the gift they sent him but now he expresses himself fully. I mean, this is a poor church, and, over the years, these people had given way beyond their means when they really couldn't afford to give. And so he tries his best to share his love and gratitude with these people that he cares for and loves.

There are **two truths** that rise up out of this passage this morning that I want to focus on. The **first truth is found in verses 14 and 16 and it centers in on the support of the Christian community.** Look with me again to what Paul says in these two verses. In verse 14 he writes, "In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress." And in verse 16 he writes, "For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs more than once." You see, these Philippian Christians sent not only financial and material support, but a whole lot more. They sent spiritual support, they sent encouragement, they sent love and prayers. When you read the letters that Paul wrote in the New Testament you find him affirming that Christian fellowship is intertwined in mutual support.

Does the name Lefty Gomez mean anything to any of you? As a pitcher for the New York Yankees in the 1930s, Baseball Hall of Famer **Vernon "Lefty" Gómez** (#11) was a major force in helping the Yankees win five American League Pennants and five World Series Championships.

When he was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame someone asked him his secret to being so successful. He replied cheerfully, "Clean living and a fast infield." Now, someone may question the first part of his response, but not the second. "A fast infield" came to his aid during many a game to make him such a success. You see, **for many of us, we are where we are and we are what we are because of other people.** I mean, just stop and think about the people who have or are in your life who have helped influence you, who have helped guide you, who have given good advice to you and even carried you when you needed help. And you know what? You can be a blessing, a help, a support to others. And what better place for it to take place than in the context of the community of faith, the church.

As some of you know I played hooky last Sunday and was not here for church. I want to thank Ryan Lawrence for filling the pulpit and doing such a great job as people have been telling me this week.

But last Sunday I was preached to a gathering of Scottish people at the Daughters of Scotia National Convention that was held out at the Hilton in Fairlawn. I spent Monday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings this past week with them at their convention. But let me just say that God works in some mysterious ways, for on Monday night, one of the delegates came up to me and thanked me for my sermon the day before. She said that on Sunday night she went back to her room and opened up her Bible and began reading it and it ministered to her. She said she was having some family issues and that after reading the Bible and praying she felt peaceful. She said she then called her husband and he reported that he felt like someone was praying for him and he had this wonderful feeling. And she shared some more and I asked her this question- "Are you a part of a Christian community?" And she said, "No." And I said you need to find a good church where they can walk with you and support you during this difficult time.

And I asked her to please, consider this, because the community of faith can be helpful at times such as this.

Look at verse 18 of our passage for just a moment. Paul uses an expressive word to convey his deep appreciation for the support of these dear friends when he says, “a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.” The point I want to make is that what we do for each other, what we say to each other needs to be done as a “sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God”—not that we have to sacrifice to serve and support others, even though that may very likely be a part of it; but the important thing is that we respond, we act on behalf of each other, knowing that what we do and say is for the sake of God.

Who needs your support, and who do you need to accept the support from so that we can truly be the church that Christ wants us to be?

The **second truth is found in verse 13 where Paul writes what has been called the Mount Everest of his life, for he writes: “I can do**

all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Folks, literally volumes could be written on this one short verse. Now when you think about it, the human being has an amazing capacity to cope. I see news reports of people at Army Reed Medical Hospital where some of our service men and women are coming back minus a limb or limbs, those who are working to recover from brain damage due to road-side bombs. They are going through therapy, treatments, having prosthesis made to fit what remains of an arm or a leg. We do have an amazing capacity to cope. And folks- the support of the Christian fellowship is crucial. Do we, the church fail at times, do we forget, do we mess up in our attempts to walk with one another? You bet. Just like you have mess-ups in your own family, so do we, in the church, but do we give up? No! But let me just say this- when it is all said and done, when it comes back to the foundation of our Christian faith it all comes down, it all comes back to the all-sufficient Savior of the world- Jesus.

Harold Bosley, who was the pastor of Christ Church in New York City once told a story out of the days of the Great Depression in the early 1930's.

It seems that a panel of speakers, including Clarence Darrow, the distinguished attorney and professed atheist, who was involved in the renowned Scopes trial of 1925 in Dayton, Tennessee , were addressing a meeting of people from Chicago's Southside, most of them African-American. The economic conditions were at their worst: money and jobs were scarce and Darrow used this information to point out the difficulties for the African-American community. He summed up their plight by saying, "And yet you sing? No one can sing like you do! What do you have to sing about?" And right then and there, a woman in the congregation shouted out, "We got Jesus to sing about!" And the gathering erupted with "Amens" and "Yeses" and "That's rights." Now get this picture in view, unlike Darrow, for once he was speechless. He had no response. Why?

Because he was face to face with something that cannot be rationalized in human terms—I mean people can sing through their tears and rise above their fears all because they walk with the one who strengthens them to do and to face all things- Jesus Christ. (*The Communicator's Commentary, Galatians, etc.*, Lloyd J. Ogilvie, p. 320-21)

Do you know the great God of the universe who, as Paul writes in verse 19 of our passage, “will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus?” If you don't, accept him today.

I leave you with this letter that was written by a pastor who was stricken with an inoperable malignancy. Rev. Doyle Masters wrote an open letter to his congregation where he shares the confidence and joy that he had in the all-sufficient Jesus, despite his circumstances. I want to share a portion of his letter with you now: “The options open to me medically are minimal and at best do not promise renewed energy nor longevity.

The other option is to turn this over to God in faith for His healing and ultimate will. This we have been directed to do by God after much prayer and spiritual surrender. What the future holds we do not know, but we know God holds it.... These past few days have rolled over us like an avalanche, leaving in their wake some central certainties which make up my Thanksgiving list. Out of the dark night of the soul has come the sunlight of God's love. I am thankful for God who is real and personal, for a Christ who is present in power, and for the Holy Spirit who is by our side in every struggle. My gratitude overflows for a faith that is unwavering in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles, and for the personal practice of prayer that brings all God's promises to bear in any situation.... My Thanksgiving list is made this year not from what I have but from who has me—a God who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all I ask or think." (*The Communicator's Commentary, Galatians, etc.*, Lloyd J. Ogilvie, p. 321)

Friends, that pastor knew, just like the Apostle Paul, the all-sufficient Christ.

The ending of the story is that Pastor Masters died too early at the age of 48, but he knew from where his strength came and he knew where he was going when his earthly life was done. He knew the all-sufficient Jesus- do you? Accept him today; recommit your life to Him today. Let's prayer...

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The reason Paul wrote this letter was to...

Two truths that rise up out of this passage this morning:

The first truth is found in vs. 14 & 16 and it centers in on the _____ of the Christian community

For many of us, we are _____ we are and we are _____ we are because of other people

Think about the people...

Verse 18 what we do for each other, what we say to each other needs to be done as a "sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God"

Who needs your support, and who do you need to accept the support from so that we can truly be the church that Christ wants us to be?

The second truth is found in vs. 13 where Paul writes what has been called the _____ of his life

We have an amazing capacity to cope... yet it all comes back to the all-sufficient Savior of the world- Jesus

Conclusion: Do you know the all-sufficient Jesus? Accept Him today; recommit your life to Him today.