

Philippians Intro & 2:1-13 BPC 28 Sept 2014 Andrew Jablonski. Life of Grace

There's something very special about a handwritten letter or greeting card, though I don't get so many handwritten letters we do get some lovely handwritten cards. We had some very precious Thank You cards handwritten by children at our Holiday Club. There's something inspiring and more personal about receiving such a letter. Something that lifts our spirits.

The Letter: Here in our first reading we have a very special letter written by Paul to the Christians at Philippi- it is written in the classical style of a letter of friendship. This whole letter is about thankfulness and joy at God's wonderful provision but under difficulties.

Paul is writing from the not so wonderful position of being chained up in a Roman jail. Paul's chains must have been uncomfortable and he was sitting on a hard floor, even harder than our pews. Yet he starts the letter with a lovely acclamation "all of you share in God's grace with me". We have a life of grace together. He proclaims "I am convinced that the one who has begun a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ." Today at baptism we think of beginnings but also in faith we pray for the full grace of God in Jessica and Grace to shape them into all that God wants them to be. And also we pray for God to shape us into all that God wants us to be.

Paul had visited Philippi on his 2nd missionary journey. Paul's 1st missionary journey from Antioch around Cyprus and modern-day Turkey had been a great success with a fine send off. His 2nd missionary journey did not seem to be such a success, everything went wrong. He started with an argument with Barnabas over Mark and went his own way in a huff. Then the Book of Acts tells us that the Holy Spirit wouldn't let them go to North Asia where he wanted to go and he ended up in Western Turkey at Troas where finally Paul had a vision calling him to Macedonia where Philippi was the main city. This was the start of Christian mission into modern day Europe around 51. AD – out of apparent failure came a huge breakthrough into the heart of real Roman territory

Philippi was a prosperous Roman colony; citizens of Philippi were given highly prized Roman citizenship. There was no significant Jewish community or synagogue so when Paul arrived he went to a place by the river where believers in the living God met to worship. Here Lydia a dealer in expensive purple goods and her household became believers. Women played an important part in religious affairs in Philippi. The first church met in Lydia's home.

Now, 10 years later, the church had grown. They've heard about Paul being in jail in Rome and sent him gifts by Epaphroditus. That's probably why Paul responds with this letter of friendship. Paul says that it gives him joy just to remember them in his prayers. Wouldn't it be nice to get that kind of letter. But all is not quite so straightforward for them.

They have **two problems** they're battling with. First they have opposition from the Roman authorities – saying Jesus is Lord instead of Caesar is Lord would get you thrown into jail.

Their **second problem** is an internal problem. Two of their leaders are having serious disagreements. And Paul in this letter urges the two leaders by name to be of one mind in Christ. These two leaders are women, who in the past have struggled together as co-workers

with St Paul for the gospel. Paul writes “I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of one mind in the Lord”. (Success and Lucky!). Their differences were undermining the church. But Paul hopes that this can be turned back to a beautiful and fruitful relationship. Paul says be of one mind – let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. Christ is their model. For the Philippians, in the ancient world military leaders such as Alexander the Great and the Roman Emperor Augustus were their models. Holding up Christ as the model for them was truly subversive.

So today’s passage is more than just a beautiful poem . It tells us about living in Christ, with the mind of Christ, with the Spirit, humility and Grace of Christ. This is some letter

He starts our passage by reminding us that we are

- in Christ
- Have the love of Christ
- Share in the Holy Spirit
- And have Christ’s heart of compassion

Paul asks that they make his Joy complete by being of one mind – letting the mind of Christ Jesus be in them

Then Paul reminds us about the mind of Christ in this great hymn or poem beginning, “who though he was in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited.”

Christ who was equal with God before all the heavens were created, yet became fully human and gave up everything humbling himself to give his life for us.

In that place of humility God exalted him. Then here at vs 9 & 10 Paul quotes from a key passage in the Old Testament Book of Isaiah 45 which proclaims that there is one God

For I am God, and there is no other.
‘To me every knee shall bow,
every tongue shall confess.

Paul wants, in their difficulties to **remember God’s generous provision**, remember that they are “in Christ” wanting them above all to know the Joy in Christ

Paul stresses that they can live in humility trusting Christ for the sake of the Gospel. Our passage ends with Paul saying “For God is working in you to help you want to do and be able to do what pleases him.”

Paul says in another letter “You are a letter from Christ written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but written on human hearts. Those cards we received from children were a little blotchy but the greeting was genuine and full of spirit.

May our lives be a letter of Christ’s grace that all can read, letters that set ablaze a fire of God’s love in our world ...even when faced with difficulties.