

"Let Peace & Compassion Prevail"

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Philippians 4:1-9

Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO

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4 ¹Therefore, my brothers and sisters,^[a] whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

Exhortations

² I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³ Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion,^[b] help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

⁴ Rejoice^[c] in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.^[d] ⁵ Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not worry 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, beloved,^[e] whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about^[f] these things. ⁹ Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

4 My dear, dear friends! I love you so much. I do want the very best for you. You make me feel such joy, fill me with such pride. Don't waver. Stay on track, steady in God.

Pray About Everything

² I urge Euodia and Syntyche to iron out their differences and make up. God doesn't want his children holding grudges.

³ And, oh, yes, Syzygus, since you're right there to help them work things out, do your best with them. These women worked for the Message hand in hand with Clement and me, and with the other veterans—worked as hard as any of us. Remember, their names are also in the Book of Life.

⁴⁻⁵ Celebrate God all day, every day. I mean, *revel* in him! Make it as clear as you can to all you meet that you're on their side, working with them and not against them. Help them see that the Master is about to arrive. He could show up any minute!

Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life.

⁸⁻⁹ Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to

praise, not things to curse. Put into practice what you learned from me, what you heard and saw and realized. Do that, and God, who makes everything work together, will work you into his most excellent harmonies.

I. GREAT EXPECTATIONS SERIES – PART 2

Today we continue into our Fall season and our series: **“Great Expectations—Of God & One Another in Love.”**

Last week we considered God’s expectations of us to reach for the goal, press on toward the prize of true unity of spirit and purpose. We committed to looking *back* and **honoring** what is past, *and* to bringing the learnings and insights, the stories and saints, *forward* into our present light and life. To leave behind, as Paul says, what is *not* helpful, and is in fact *hurtful*, and serves no good purpose.

And to press *on*, in community, striving forward in *faith, hope and love* to what lies ahead. We gathered in Worldwide Communion, with children of God all over the country *and* the world, remembering Christ’s command to “set another place at the Table”—always and forevermore.

II. PAUL’S EXPECTATIONS

And here we are, today, with the Apostle Paul. In prison, of all places! He has gotten himself into some trouble with the state. He has been “silent no more” in the face of oppression and inhumanity. Has stood up strong for his beliefs and convictions.

So, he’s not just writing a little “Instruction Manual” from his cabin in the woods, or sitting in the sun on the dock at his beach house. He’s carrying on his ministry with zeal, even in a kind of exile. And, even awaiting trial (and possibly death?) by the Romans, he’s *not* to be dissuaded.

The Letter to the Philippians starts out as a little “thank you note” to this congregation of friends, with whom he has labored long and lovingly in the work of spreading and living the gospel.

It seems some from that congregation have traveled a long way to deliver a gift to him in prison. So, he sits down to write a thank you note, but since he’s also learned of some “dissenting dynamics” among the leadership, he decides he needs to write a little more and voila! Epistle to the Church in Philippi is birthed, and becomes scripture for the ages. Even from prison. Paul’s not inclined to write short notes, or to *not* give advice on how to live and dwell in community, so we shouldn’t be *too* surprised!

And thank God, for that. Because this passage couldn’t be more timely for *us*—all these eons later.

III. GOD’S GUIDELINES & EXPECTATIONS

Why? Because, from prison, in this “little love-letter” to the Beloved Congregation, Paul lays out what he believes are “God’s guidelines.” Spells out “The Great Expectations from the Great, Ever-calling-us-into Greater-Communion-Holy-One.”

Expectation A: Stand Firm. Don't Waver. Stay on Track.

We are charged to “Stand steady and ready”—*not* in the security of human beings. Or in the systems that we try to rely on. Not looking to the way of the world, with its false trust in security that is not secure. *Not* trusting in “law and order.” But, Paul urges: “Stand firm in the Lord.” Stand strong. At attention. In the Way of Jesus—The Way of Peace and Compassion.

B. Work out your Differences

Surprise! Apparently, there have been disagreements about how to do things in the church, as long as there has been The Church! This passage right here is proof that tensions in congregations are no modern problem! It's *also* proof that women were an essential and integral part of the key leadership in the Early Church! Euodia and Syntyche were apostles, working right alongside Paul and Clement and all the others.

And, like all the apostles and disciples, they had differing perspectives—moments of dissent?—perhaps conflicting opinions on how things should be done in the church. Or “the ways they've always been done?” *And*, they needed to work it out—together—*with* the men *and* the other women. As do we all.

C. Rejoice! Together! It's plural!

And, after we get those differences ironed out, or even in the midst of the process and the dialogue, we are expected to Rejoice!

Revel, in fact! In the Lord. In the bonds of love, in the Body of Christ. In the belonging and unconditional love we find here, in this holy place. In this family of God.

In fact, Rejoice is *plural!* As are all of Paul's commands in this Letter. His challenges to us, and all, for how to live and walk in the faith. His exhortations of how we will live into God's Expectations—all of it—is to everyone. Plural. We are to do all these things TOGETHER, and our joy is incomplete unless it is shared!

Rejoice, you all! To put it in a Texas drawl!

D. Build Bridges

We are expected to build bridges, not walls. “Make it as clear as you can to all you meet that you're on their side, working with them and not against them,” Paul says.

I love it put that way! In these days, when so much “which side are you on?” prevails in our culture. When we look at all the yard signs in our neighborhood and beyond, to decide if someone is on “our side” or not. Paul says, we're all on the *same* side! This human journey of life we're all on, is *not* on differing sides!

We're all in the human race! Running the race alongside one another. Sharing the planet together—we need to look out for our home and each another—together!

And God DOES have expectations of us and for us. Even in difficult times. We are expected to:

To Be the Church.

Not to be a partisan party. Or to live out of that as our primary identity.

We are not to be an “in club.” Not a camp.

But we *are* Christ’s Body—many members, differing gifts. Variety of ways of being, doing, acting in the world.

These times call for us to: “Stretch our Compassion muscle.”

God expects us to find a way of reaching out with “holy civility” that transcends and upbuilds humanity—not a hostility that tears down our brothers and sisters. That we live out of a spirit of compassion for *all* God’s creation that causes us to: “Think Globally and act locally”—NOT just think about our own country. Not “Me First.”

“Make it as clear as you can to all you meet that you’re on their side, working with them and not against them.” Now, THAT is a great expectation.

E. Let Peace Prevail

We are to let peace prevail. More than anxiety.

Let petitions and praises ‘shape your worries into prayers,’ letting God know your concerns.

It doesn’t get any better than that! “Shape your worries into prayers.” I’m putting that on my mirror. On my fridge! On my forehead!

Alyce McKenzie reminds us that this is *not* something we do by our own willpower. Phew! Not a should, but a “get to.” We GET to allow God to work in us—to bring us peace and bring us to peace of mind.

“The Philippians are not called to **imitate** the peace of Christ, but to **accept** the gift of that peace being offered to them by the Grace of God, accessed through the habit of **prayer.**”

“Not a call to **banish our anxieties by sheer will power**; not a human achievement at all, but a gift from God. I can ‘psyche myself up’ in other areas of life. But I need God to bring peace to my soul.”

Maybe Paul could have written it more like this, in a slightly different order, she suggests!

“The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding is guarding your heart and your mind in Christ Jesus right now. Whether you *feel* this at an emotional level or not, this is the truth. So get in the habit of constant prayer, and you will come more and more into contact with this gift of peace. Do not beat yourself up that you have anxious thoughts. This is our common human tendency.”

Phew! I’m glad it’s not on us! Simply being told, “Do not be anxious” just makes my blood pressure rise!

F. Focus on These things.

So, after we “let go, let God” with that peace of mind and anxiety thing, we are free to focus on what really matters. And what better time to hone in our focus than now?

Cuz, here we go! We are on a countdown to the election. And, we might have in our possession a Voter’s Manual, or a “Guide for voting as people of Faith.” But, what we have here in our bible, is the best Voter’s Guide of all.

Think.on.these.things.

What if we used THIS passage right here—from ancient scriptures—OUR scriptures as People of the Way—as a stencil? What if we made it an overlay of sorts, to place atop the page on any ballot issue or candidate or party platform, and looked at every item through this lens?

Look at the voter’s manual, listen to the issues from all sides. Listen to the candidate’s platforms. Overlay this message on it, like a stencil and ask ourselves the question: What would be the best way to vote on this issue or candidate, using this rubric as a guide?

⁸ Finally, beloved,^[e] whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about^[f] these things.

IV. Let Peace and Compassion Prevail

Finally, beloved, let peace and compassion prevail. God expects us to come together and figure out what we agree on. Not that we all have to agree on everything! But, what are the essentials? The core values, tenets of our faith?

Finally, beloved, let us Find Joy. TOGETHER. Amidst the struggles. In the little things, the simple pleasures of life.

Whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable. Whatever is of Excellence—worthy of praise—anything!

⁸⁻⁹ Summing it all up, friends, I’d say you’ll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse. Put into practice what you learned from me, what you heard and saw and realized. Do that, and God, who makes everything work together, will work you into his most excellent harmonies.

Amen.