

The Rock: 04-25-2021

Philippians: The letter of Joy

First reading: 1 Timothy 4: 11-15

Title: Friends for the journey

Scripture: Philippians 2:19-30

Theme:

The Christian journey is not one that is or should be taken alone. Many of us would not be where we are were it not for the support of those closest to us.

Introduction:

I sit and begin to type, usually around 4 am on a Friday. I think back over the years and stages of life to places, events, and faces.

Again, my buddy Steve and the Paw Sox games when I was really young, and the wiffle ball games in the back yard.

To Chris, my friend from the fifth grade until I moved to VT, and all the things we used to do. Snow football, finding our way through the state forest, and many other things I am thankful happened pre-social media. Culpable deniability is a beautiful thing.

To Robbie, Gloria, and so many along the way who journeyed with me. To Chris, Eric, Parks, to Dave. The list goes on and on. This begins to look like Romans 16, as I can't forget, Rachel, Alicia, Lynne, Sue. Dan, who I am just beginning that journey with and am glad of it.

Life and ministry would never happen without them. Ups, downs, struggles, joys
--LIFE

To Roland, who over what has been a lifetime, has journeyed with me as a spiritual Dad.

A list of names always means something to someone. They are not just put down for the purpose of filling a page.

My best friend of over 35 years, Lisa. Our journey together as Christians has been a roller coaster, with all of its ups and downs.

Four kids, five grand kids, a few moves, but always constantly by my side. Trusted, trusting, loving, patient and supportive.

Each of you have a list like that. People along the way who encouraged, who held you up, even if just in prayer, had an encouraging word.

The Story:

Here in the middle of this letter, Paul takes a bit of a break, a pause from his teaching to say: "I'm not doing this alone. Not only that, I am encouraged that I'm not."

Has it been an easy ride? No. We have had our ups and downs, as I fought with and separated from Barnabas. Wish I didn't, as pride gets in the way of so many things.

But it has been a joy in all of its twists and turns. Without my friends, I would not be able to continue. They test me, hold me accountable, frustrate me at times, I frustrate them at times.

It's almost as though any one of us could have written that, and perhaps we probably should. No matter what, friends for the journey are needed., even if at times we would prefer those quiet alone moments.

Friends are hard work, of that there is no doubt. Timothy, this young, next gen pastor, and then Epaphroditus, a leader from Philippi sent to help and support Paul with his ministry and needs.

There doesn't seem to be any clear theological teaching here in these verses, just Paul revealing his tender,

personal heart and private side. A window into the heart of a pastor and apostle.

Sitting and thinking of all those whose lives and dedication have helped him and allowed him to do what he was called to do.

I can do what I do because you are doing what you do.

"I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ."

-Philippians 2:19-21 ESV

Paul gives us some insight into Timothy's usefulness and helpfulness in ministry, as compared to others in Ephesus where Timothy has been set down to pastor.

It's crazy how even then within the church Paul was having to sort out problem children. Seeking their own interest and giving Timothy a hard time.

You see, Timothy, although timid and a bit diffident as a pastor, had a genuine heart to serve, and to do it right. I'm reminded here of the relationships and the backstory of Timothy found in Acts

16, as well as both of the letters Paul wrote to him.

How his grandmother and mother were faithful believers. Timothy is only half Jewish, but having been raised in the faith by these two ladies, he stepped into the call of God and pastoral ministry after having spent so much time with Paul and being faithful to learn, to grow, and to serve.

Not that the journey was without trouble, but Timothy stayed the course, and was always mentored and disciplined by Paul, as any spiritual father would.

You see, mentoring, whether it be up or down, younger folks to the older (needed) or older to younger (Also needed), because both have a great deal to say of importance and value.

Who are we looking to and who are we allowing to look to us? Friends for the journey, even at times when disagreements happen, remain friends. That includes when we continue to disagree. We cannot simply cancel and / or eliminate anyone or anything that will not fall into our way of thinking and doing.

That's not friendship, it is an entirely different thing, and not all together a

good thing. In fact, it is very dangerous.

Discipleship also, is always feeding into the next generation, and growing the Church. Add to that the advancing of the Gospel. Unchanging and relevant even in and ever-changing culture and world.

Neither we, nor the Scriptures should ever change in order to "stay current and relevant". They are relevant because they are unchanging!

They do speak into our current situations and circumstances because they are God's word, unchanging and applicable, always.

When we minimize or change the unchanging truths of the Gospel, we are no longer dealing with the Gospel.

Timothy had to be encouraged in this way, and his ability to hold the line, even in light of those mentioned here in verse 21, is why he is and has been so beneficial and helpful for Paul.

Friends for the journey, we need them. Do you have them? Are you also rooting yourselves in the Scriptures so you can understand the world correctly? Or, are you trying to make sense of the Scriptures in light of what you see in the world?

That makes all the difference in the world, actually. Timothy's task was to watch himself and how he taught. Why? Because he was called to teach and to the best of his abilities in the Holy Spirit, get it right:

"Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers."

-1 Timothy 4: 16 ESV

"As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."

-2 Timothy 4:5 ESV

Neither of these were in light of his opinion or how he felt, as Paul's makes clear, but in relation to what the book actually says:

"Command and teach these things. Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these

things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress."

-1 Timothy 4:11-15 ESV

A pastor's job is to study to show themselves approved, as Paul puts it. Understand and teach God's word to God's people, by the power of God's Spirit. Why? Because they are under your care, and as much as it depends on you, you are responsible for their spiritual growth. So, opinions are just that, opinions. But the Scriptures...

This is what makes Timothy "of proven worth", as Paul puts it in verse 22:

"But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel."

-Philippians 2:22 ESV

But neither this great apostle Paul or Timothy were going at this all alone. They had each other's friendship in all of the ups and downs of Gospel ministry.

So, in light of the fact that I cannot be with you at the moment, I am sending Timothy, my "son" in the Gospel in my place. Trust him, love him, treat him as you would me as he deeply loves you.

Whose ben there for you? Through the thick and thin? Who has taught you, mentored you, prayed with and for you?

I look around this room and see many who have poured into those who are now adults. Teaching the Bible, praying with and taking the time to teach the scriptures and simply do life with others.

Friends for the journey -spiritual sons and daughters, brothers and sisters in Christ.

Epaphroditus-quite the name- and quite the friend it seems. Especially in service to others at great cost to himself.

"I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow."

-Philippians 2:25-27 ESV

Wow, serving almost to the point of death for others. There is a Jesus example right there. One that we should all

prayerfully try to live up to in our own sphere of influence.

If for no other reason than that someone somewhere at some point did so for you, for me. Perhaps is even now, still doing so.

Praying it forward. Or:

"We love because he first loved us."

-1 John 4:19 ESV

And if love is a verb as well as a noun, as we were reminded of in our marriage challenge class, then let's remember that love is shown as much as it simply is.

You see:

"...God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

-Romans 5:8 ESV

It seems that Epaphroditus got the memo. Because Jesus did all that for me, what wouldn't I do for Him and His church?

Where do you think he learned that? If not directly from Paul and his pastoral teaching, from someone who was mentored and disciplined by him. How and where did we learn? The same exact way.

Epaphroditus, there through it all. The think and thin. I am sure even through agreement and disagreement. That is life, that is friendship. It is not always smooth sailing.

Let's not forget our very first teaching here in Philippians, and that we learned about Paul and Barnabas, best friends split over a disagreement regarding Mark and his shortcomings in ministry.

Even though later in life Paul not only regretted that, but had taken Mark under his wing and found him useful in ministry and a friend in life. That happened because Peter actually took Mark and mentored him and disciplined him.

It seems that Paul, in his spiritual working out of his salvation was a bit stubborn, blunt and a bit hard headed. Perhaps even difficult to work with at times.

Welcome to the Gospel story where real people, doing real life, at a real time and place in history. Leaving their journey recorded, in God's goodness, for us in His inspired and infallible word to help us even today.

Paul knows Epaphroditus's worth and he wants his friends in Philippi to

experience first-hand the blessings that he is and has been:

"I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me."

-Philippians 2:28-30 ESV

None of these folks walked on water. They didn't always get along, as I said, Paul was a very difficult man it seems. Stubborn, a perfectionist, and quick tempered.

But hey, Peter was fickle, proud and boastful. The other disciples were so many things as well. Doubtful, pessimistic, slow to learn, quick to judge and cast out those who they didn't think fit.

Timothy, timid and diffident, in need of a lot of instruction. Just read the first letter to him thinking all the while that Paul is answering questions written to him by this young pastor.

Try for a moment to think of what those question may have been in light of the

answers we have recorded and preserved for us.

One of the most important first steps in working out our salvation is to identify and be honest about what we actually need to work out!

I see my sin best in others, not in myself. The hardest part of God working in us, is the truth that we are shown what needs to be worked out, and then get to work.

That means we really need to remind ourselves that the biggest problem we will face every day, whether we wish to admit it or not, is always the person staring back at us in the mirror when we brush our teeth in the morning.

That person, more than anyone else will cause you the most trouble. God then takes a whole bunch of people just like that, and in building a people for His own, has the audacity to put us all together as adopted King's kids, and calls us The Church!

We can pick our friends, but we are stuck with family. Genuine, unconditional love understands that, as well as the difficulty of growing into that.

God calls us to love. Timothy, in the midst of what seems like some difficult

people in his local congregation, learned to love.

Epaphroditus had, it seems, an illness to deal with. It is clear though that he understood sacrificial familial love. I don't come first. People are broken and a bit difficult at times, but that will not keep me from loving like Jesus.

Both of these men, and so many more like them, jump off the pages of Scripture, if we remember that they are more than just names, were friends for the journey.

Paul begins to turn the corner in his letter, and starting next week his looking at the personal side of things and his encouraging words to them have a lot to say to us even to today, but that begins next week.