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The National Presbyterian Church

“Shine Like Stars”

Philippians 2:14-30

Joyce Emery

The epistles are full of wonderful theological concepts, statements that make us think and shape our lives. We study and tuck them in our memories to pull out for strength and inspiration.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited. Amazing to ponder.

The story of people and relationships are there as well – but we often skip over them because we don't know the people. They are far removed from our lives. It is like standing at the tombstone at Arlington Cemetery or any cemetery– seeing the name, the rank, the date of birth and death, knowing that there was a story – a profound story, a family, relationships, faith, commitment, courage, but it is lost to us. Theological concepts are amazing – but unless we can live them out together – in relationship – they make little difference. So, I'm continuing the summer series of Philippians this morning and thinking about relationships that help us “Shine like Stars” in the world. I continue reading the scripture where Chris/Glenn left off:

“²¹ For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.²² But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. ²³ I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. ²⁴ And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.

²⁵ But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. ²⁶ For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. ²⁷ Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. ²⁸ Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. ²⁹ So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, ³⁰ because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.” This too is the Word of the Lord.

Paul names Timothy and Epaphroditus. Why were these men important to Paul? What are their stories?

Please join me in prayer.

Paul hopes to send Timothy to the believers in Philippi. What do we know of Timothy? We know that Timothy lived in Lystra, in what is modern day Turkey. Paul came through Lystra preaching, healing, and teaching on his first missionary journey. When Paul comes through on

his second journey with Silas he finds Timothy a respected leader as well as his Grandmother Lois and Mother Eunice. Timothy at some point heard and believed in the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. Paul wants Timothy to accompany them. Apparently Timothy's father was a Greek Gentile. Acts 16:1-3 tells us that Timothy was circumcised to help with his ministry with the Jews. In Acts 16 we learn the wonderful stories of the beginning of the Church in Philippi. Paul, Silas, Timothy are traveling together on their journey to Macedonia where Philippi is located around 52 AD. In Philippi, Timothy is present for the conversion of Lydia out by the river where the people went to pray. It is believed that there was no Jewish synagogue because Philippi was a Roman City. It is in Philippi that the conversion of the jailer takes place. The jailer believes that Paul and Silas have escaped from prison after an earthquake shakes the doors open. But they remain to give witness to the power of God in Christ. The jailer believes and he and his household are baptized. Around 64 AD Paul leaves Timothy in Ephesus to help lead the Church. Timothy, according to tradition will become the first Christian Bishop of Ephesus. Hebrews 13 tells us that Timothy is released from prison at some point in time. We do not know where. But all in all Timothy is someone that can be trusted, who has walked with the believers, and Paul intends to send him back to the believers in Philippi. This is good news. Timothy will encourage the believers, encourage and help them shine.

And so too will Epaphroditus. He comes from Philippi and was originally sent by the believers in Philippi to serve Paul during his time in prison. He was sent with a gift of money – and also as a gift himself to support Paul while in an actual prison or under house arrest. We presume Paul is in Rome – scholars are not absolutely sure. What a generous heart this congregation of believers has – to send one of their own to minister to Paul. And apparently Epaphroditus has been most helpful – and yet he had become gravely ill, almost to death. The Philippians have been deeply concerned. I find it amazing that the people of the First Century kept track of each other, prayed for each other, collected gifts for one another without all of our modern aids of communication and travel. Paul is sending this letter back with Epaphroditus. He will be the letter carrier. These believers are bonded together in love, sharing mutual concern, demands, sorrows, rewards and joys. Matthew 18:20 Where two or three have gathered together, there I am in the midst of them. The believers in Philippi are experiencing Jesus in their midst through one another. Light is shining.

It is fun to comb the scriptures and find details - looking for connections and configurations of relationships. Being connected makes a difference – and also brings light to guide us on our way. I think of all of the times that I have referred back to Timothy's mother Eunice and Grandmother Lois as shared with us in II Timothy. Oh to be nurtured in the faith by our parents and grandparents – this is the call. What is the most treasured item we have to pass along – our faith in Christ. And yet it is not always easy.

It may not always be easy to serve together with others but that is our call. Paul did not always do well with his partners, he got upset with John Mark and they parted ways. But Paul always needed partners to shine – and he lists them and we often skip over them, especially the women. In our passage today Paul uses the term you – which is plural. “Do all things without murmuring and arguing, so that **YOU** may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which **YOU** shine like stars in the world.” We join together to shine.

I have taught 100's of children the song “This Little Light of Mine” over the years. Henry Dixon Loes composed this song for children in the 1920's. This song was inspired by Jesus teaching

from the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5:14-16. “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before others, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” We like Paul, get to join arms with others, and step out to accomplish great things for Christ. We become constellations of light – guiding others to the power and love of God through Christ. It is not as if we say to ourselves “self- I’m going to have a star with my name on it on Hollywood Boulevard someday,” or “self – someday there will be stars on my tombstone at Arlington,” rather, we commit ourselves to the work of God in the world and join arms with others, praying that our lives will make a difference for Christ in the world.

Two of my favorite childhood/teenage games were three legged races with a scratchy old burlap bag, and tug-a-war. Now as a Christian educator I would not allow those games anymore – too dangerous – but do some of you remember the joy of the three legged race with a partner where it worked? Where you synced and once you got your stride could have not only won the race – but kept walking together forever? I remember that joyous feeling. Or to be on a team in tug-a-war where we got the rhythm of pulling together and taking the other team off their feet. Images of pulling together!

Spiritual light requires you and I working together to support one another. Think how a great friendship radiates – a great marriage – a great working team - we love to tell the stories.

One reason we take people on mission trips is so that they will have to work with others. Can you imagine what it would have been like to take a missionary journey with the Apostle Paul? Our Pastor Dr. Renwick and wife Currie will have lots of stories to tell as they have just returned from learning the stories of the Journeys of the Apostle Paul. We know that Paul faced shipwrecks and beatings and imprisonment – and how amazing to think of the people who journeyed with him – Silas, Barnabas, Timothy – and those who were sent to encourage him, Epaphroditus.

It would not have been easy for many reasons – but God was right in the middle of it. Lighting the light of salvation that would expand across the globe.

I took my faith seriously as a teenager – but I could not do it by myself. I always needed my family – my church family and I needed a best friend – to stand for Christ with me – her name was Jeanette. We stood together for Christ at Puyallup High School. “You are the light of the world.” As a young pastor I was deeply moved by a parishioner – a friend – Erma who had mercy on my and volunteered as the Church secretary for four years. I had come from California and a large church staff where there were two administrative secretaries I could call upon. In this setting in rural Colorado – I was it, pastor, secretary, janitor, trouble shooter, and sexton. Erma, with many years of experience in Chicago city government and church administration – volunteered to help so that I could pursue spiritual gifts that were outside the Church office – and God used us in amazing ways to reach people for Christ and work on transforming projects in our little city. “A city set on a hill cannot be hid.” I know you, like I, have stories galore – remember them – tell them. In this place I am so grateful for the people with whom I get to serve – it starts in our little Care Office with the amazing Liz Martin and extends to the whole staff and the Deacons and Stephen Ministers, the congregation. “Light a lamp, and put it on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.”

Look around you – there are people in these pews that are shining like stars. There are families, there are couples, there are singles each willing to commit their lives to Christ and invest in others, to pour their lives out for Christ. Paul talks about being “poured out as a libation upon the sacrificial offering of your faith.” We know little about the sacrificial systems of his day – but we do understand bringing an offering and pouring part of it out to be a blessings. We are called to pour ourselves out together to be a blessings.

Light also brings the ability to see – to awake – to be aware...to address tough issues.

In thinking about this sermon I’ve thought of many historical figures that have shone like stars for Christ. Martin Luther needed Philipp Melanchthon to call for a Reformation. Melanchthon joined Luther at the University of Wittenberg. He was a systematic theologian, an educator, a key partner with Luther in the Reformation.

John Wesley and Charles Wesley did not always agree – but their witness was profound – and George Whitfield was a friend/colleague – who also did not always agree with Joh but who would be used by the very Spirit of God to spawn the first Great Awakening in the Colonies – some would say that George’s preaching planted seeds for the revolution. Light.

I love the story of William Booth and Catherine Booth, father and daughter who founded the Salvation Army, soup, soap and salvation.

William Henry Sheppards, an African American preacher and Samuel Lapsley, a white man, both from Alabama who would go to the Congo Valley in 1890 and spend 20 years reaching people with Christ and addressing issues of slavery on the African continent.

Luis Palau settled in Beaverton, Oregon after attending Multnomah School of the Bible. He would begin a ministry that would expand around the globe beginning in Argentina. Luis was mentored by Billy Graham, and his son Kevin is very influential today in the greater Portland, Oregon area. The Palau organization has sponsored City Fest a great event that brings faith communities and public service/government efforts together. Together the Palau organization has helped bridge the gaps to deal with homelessness and poverty issues.

So many stories to learn – so much light.....what light will be generated from this congregation, this generation, now and into the future?

The night sky in the summertime yields wonderful constellations that help us determine our location. These stars shining across the billions of miles align themselves into beloved constellations:

Ursa Major and Minor, Polaris to the North, going South Hercules, to the West Cassiopeia, Pegasus East Bootes, going south Sagittarius, Scorpius stars aligned together to guide us. Paul gives us a choice in our passage this morning. Will we be configured to shine like stars or will we be mumblers and grumblers?

I have worked with dozens and dozens of churches over the years – I used to get called in to deal with trouble. Trouble was sometimes just people who were grumbling and questioning the leadership – putting up road blocks, clergy killers, and toxic people. We know that the church is a place for sinners – a hospital a place to get well – but honestly, do you want to be known as o a critic, a grumbler and a mumbler? Or will you be known and remembered as someone who brings light – is a joy to serve with – a good friend in Christ — Paul asks us to claim the teaching

and work of Jesus who says - “Let your light so shine before others, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

This is about serving together – not just being in small group, or serving on a committee – but working with others – laboring together – sharing your deepest strengths and your deepest fears. Being real, authentic -

A few pointers

-learn the stories of the past – where God has worked – watch for the stories today

– maintain one strong friendship in Christ. Find God’s person who will pray with you, hold you accountable, and know you. This may be a spouse – but it may not be.

Find a cause in your community or the world that you believe in – learn everything you can about it – invest your time and energy. Join with others who are doing the same. Join arms.

Set yourself up to join others in allowing God, through Christ, to use you to shine like a star.

Cover all of this in prayer and watch God bring light – eternal, brilliant light.

Like you, I have been a part of Christian communities that have served and hopefully shown for Christ. We sung together, on beaches, around campfires, in circles, in sanctuaries. “We are the family of God.” “Friends are Friends Forever.” (Michael W. Smith) and I will always treasure singing with others, “Blest be the Tie that Binds.” Today we sing as well in this place, as we celebrate relationships rooted and grounded in Christ that have changed the world forever. Thank you Paul, Silas, Timothy and Epaphroditus for your example. To the Glory of God. Amen.

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THE NATIONAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
4101 Nebraska Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20016
www.NationalPres.org 202.537.0800