

"On the Corner of Faith and Life"
Philippians 2:12-16/Deuteronomy 31:24-32:5/Luke 10:25-37
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I. Introduction

Imagine cancelling worship on the 5th Sunday of a month, and taking the congregation out into the neighborhood in groups to share Jesus' love with those in need. Imagine groups of Christians "being Christ" on an occasional Sunday morning by; caring for the forgotten in nursing homes, cleaning up litter in a park, cleaning up graffiti on the side of a building, and doing yard work for older folks who just can't do it anymore. Does it sound crazy? Here's the story of a church doing just that.

(Play video>"One Church," Righnow Trader Stories)

Imagine moving from knowing to doing.....from Sunday to Monday.....from church to neighborhood.....from faith to life. Paul has the same thing in mind when he writes to his friends in Philippi.

II. Text

Read: Philippians 2:12-16.

III. Brief Exegesis

Paul's personal presence is a strong motivator. He has spent time with his friends in Philippi, and helped them form a church. His strength, faith and courage became their strength, faith and courage. He led by example, and they followed.

And because they knew and loved their friend Paul, his letter to the church in Philippi was also a strong motivator. It was to be read and reread when the congregation gathered, and as it was read they heard his familiar voice. In his presence they had followed this leadership. Now, in his absence, they would do the same. Paul calls upon his authority in the Philippian Church to help them in a time of need....and they will carefully listen.

But as Paul instructs his friends in the way of faith and following Jesus, there is also more going on here. Paul is in prison, and he knows he may never see his friends in Philippi again. So he writes a type of "final word" to them. It is patterned off the final word of Moses to Israel in our reading in Deuteronomy this morning. Moses has been with Israel for 40 years. He has given them God's law. He has led them out slavery in Egypt, and through the wilderness to the edge of a land promised by God. They have had the presence of his leadership. But now, as his time to die nears, Moses writes to

Israel, and the generations to come. In his coming absence this writing is to have the authority of his presence.....they are to hear the voice of Moses as if he is still with them.

And so Paul, likewise, writes to his friends. He has shared the stories of Jesus, birthed their faith, and helped start the church. He has suffered with them, and rejoiced with them. They have had the presence of his leadership. But Paul knows his time of death may be near. So he writes to his friends, and in his coming absence this writing is to have the authority of his presence.....they are to hear the voice of Paul still with them.

Paul also motivates his friends in Philippi by this pride in them. This is not self-serving pride, but the pride of a grandparent.....the pride of love. This is the pride of grandparents who will travel 1000's of miles to see their 4 year old granddaughter's 3 minute ballet performance. This is the pride of grandparents telling the stories of grandchildren with a smile. This is the pride of excited new grandparents carrying around the picture of "the baby," always ready to show friends. This is Paul's pride. It's pride that at the end of days he can stand before Jesus Christ and say, "Yea, those are my friends from Philippi."

Paul finally wants to motivate his friends with a type of "ministerial hope." We all hope that the causes we give our lives to.....the work we do.....the people we love....that it will all really make a difference. And that is the way of ministry also. Pastors and church leaders hope that they have made a difference with the people they have loved, shared and worked with. Here Paul hopes that he has not "run and labored in vain." He hopes that his life of ministry with his friends has been a life well spent....that it has made a difference.

Paul is "pulling every string".....doing everything he can to motivate this friends in Philippi. And all this motivation is about only a few words; "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Repeat) (Phil. 2:12b). All this motivation is about the importance of these few words; "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." It's Paul's way of saying; move from knowing to doing.....move from Sunday to Monday.....move from church to neighborhood.....move from faith as knowing to faith as living. It's Paul's way of saying; "Imagine the cancelling the worship of Jesus on a Sunday, so to be Jesus with those in need in your neighborhood. Love your neighbor as yourself.....Go and do likewise. Can you imagine such a thing?"

My wife Jeanne and I were talking a couple of weeks ago when she mentioned that she noticed when she had the magnetic signs about her business on the side of her car.....she drove more cautiously and more gracefully. She was conscience of the

fact that the way she drove would be connected to what people thought about her business. I am aware of the same thing when I drive the church bus; does my driving honor and respect the name that everyone sees?

And that got me to thinking; can you imagine if we wore some type of “follower of Jesus” sign on our lives, so that people could connect how we live with what we believe. Might we live differently? Or even better, suppose we wore no signs, but the quality of our lives made people stop and notice, and ask about why we act with such love, care and joy. Imagine that. That’s Paul’s point; “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” All of Paul’s motivation has come down to this one, simple, but deep charge; “live into the fullness of God’s salvation for you.....live as people in the kingdom of God.”

IV. Theological Reflections

During our vacation Jeanne and I spent four days in downtown Minneapolis during the Presbyterian Church (USA) General Assembly. And I remember on a Friday evening standing on the corner of Nicolette and 3rd Ave. Nicolette is filled with trendy bars, clubs, restaurants and art galleries. It was busy with people getting off work and meeting friends. And 3rd Avenue was filled with folks at General Assembly going to and from their hotel rooms. You could tell they were part of the General Assembly because they had name tags. Thousands of people were on the streets. Everyone was walking. Two very busy streets filled with people. And there on the corner of Nicolette and 3rd Avenue you could see it all.....you were part of people going both places.....you were in a type of “cross current of life.”

That image of a busy street corner came to mind as I read through this text in Philippians. I think Paul is saying:

“Don’t go down life without your faith. And don’t walk down faith without your life. Instead, stand at the busy corner. Stand at the corner of faith and life. Stand at the corner where the salvation of God intersects the ways of life.”

And this image was strong enough, so I asked Tim Jones and Mitzi Kuster if they might make a street sign for us.....a sign for the corner of faith and life. (Show and set up street sign.)

So what do you do on the corner of faith and life? I think you do two things. One, you look for the work of God. On Sunday morning, the 4th of July, I went out to start our car, and it won’t start. In fact it won’t do anything. At the very least the battery was dead.....and possibly more. I thought, “Great, Sunday morning, the 4th of July.....this ought to be an interesting experience. Instead of attending the General

Assembly worship service I have to deal with broken car.” And it did prove to be interesting, but not like I expected.

The guy who came to give us a “jump” was there in 30 minutes, was kind and helpful.....and the car started. The hotel receptionist where we stayed recommended a garage, and called to make sure it was open.....and it was.....and only a mile or two away. The garage, “Bobby and Steve’s Auto World” was easy to find, and they got us right in. “Bobby and Steve’s Auto World” is a large garage, with gas pumps, a large convenience store, and a short order café. I thought people working on the 4th of July would be grumpy....but not at “Bobby and Steve’s Auto World.” The clerk on the register was nice. The short order cook, Michael, was nice. The guy in charge of the garage was nice. We ate breakfast while they checked out the car. And come to find out, we just needed a new battery, so in 45 minutes we were on our way.

On the way out Jeanne picked up a company newsletter. We discovered that “Bobby and Steven’s Auto World” is a Christian company. And their big interest is moving the beliefs of Christian faith to the ways of life and business. They’ve built their business on the corner of faith and life. And that’s why they were open on Sundays; to help stranded motorists. I don’t know if the guys in the garage, the short order cook, or the clerk are Christians, but I do know they were Good Samaritans to us.....Good Samaritans on the corner of faith and life on a 4th of July Sunday morning. We didn’t get to the General Assembly worship service, but we had an experience that was, perhaps, more profound.

On the busy corner of faith and life look for the work of God. That’s the first thing.

And second, on the corner of faith and life, do the work of God. That’s really the point of the Good Samaritan parable, isn’t it? It isn’t just knowing the answer; “love God and neighbor.” But it’s the next step; “Go and do likewise.” “Doing the work of God” can mean cancelling worship on the 5th Sunday of the month, and going out into the community to show the kingdom of God. “Doing the work of God” can mean helping with the Backpack Food mission to feed hungry kids, helping in the AfterSchool@First mentoring mission, serving meals to the hungry at Prince of Peace, making dresses for kids in Africa out of pillow cases, inviting a lonely senior citizen to your home for lunch, and welcoming a visitor following worship.

On the corner of faith and life there are busy “cross currents of faith and life,” and it’s right here where we can:

Be stars that shine in the night sky (Phil. 2:15);

Love God and neighbor (Luke 10:27);

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12).

On the corner of faith and life.....it's an interesting place. Where else would you want to be?