

Philippians 2:14-18

14 Do all things without murmuring and arguing, 15 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. 16 It is by your holding fast to the word of life that I can boast on the day of Christ that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. 17 But even if I am being poured out as a libation over the sacrifice and the offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you 18 and in the same way you also must be glad and rejoice with me (NRSV).

Philippi is a Roman colony in Macedonia. It was visited by Apostle Paul along with Timothy, Silas, and some others. Years later, the Apostle Paul is in prison somewhere and he sends word to pray for him and to send some provisional care. The Philippian church sends a man named Epaphroditus and Paul sends him back with this letter. The letter is addressed to the church in Philippi. However, it is placed in the scriptures so it is written for all of us. Paul thanks the church for their help but has a more pressing concern. He advises the Philippian Christians that they need to distinguish things truly matter from those that do not. His imprisonment is insignificant; what really matters is the advance of the gospel. So, he writes to console them and to emphasize his joy.

Paul's situation reminds me of the phrase "there's no pain in the end zone." It's a football metaphor. I do not remember where I heard it. It means that the excitement of scoring takes the pain away. In football there are bumps, bruises, injuries, and pain. But when you score the winning touchdown then there is no pain. You don't feel it due to the adrenaline rush. So, there is no pain in the end zone. The Apostle Paul is happy and excited even though he is in prison. What is important to him is the spread of the gospel. The authorities have locked him up to stop the spread of gospel. However, the gospel is spreading with success. So, the Apostle Paul is actually happy and excited. So, he reassures them not to worry about him but to celebrate along with him.

Today's Scripture is within the realm of Paul's encouragement and call for celebration. He lays down solid theological doctrine that is a valuable lesson for any church especially one that is experiencing conflict. When you confess your faith, you essentially make a pledge of allegiance to the teachings of the New Testament. The Scripture today teaches us to do everything without murmuring and arguing. Every church conflict is in violation of this Scripture. Every complaint comes from someone that claims to be right but is not following this specific Bible verse as well as other Bible verses. It takes inner soul searching and sincere reflection to be able to be the person that God directs you to be (blameless and innocent) within a world that is full of corruption. It takes a lot of discipline to be able to maintain focus that is centered on Jesus.

What we typically do is we take a complaint and pass it along. There are not enough meat balls in the spaghetti. So we go and tell others about it. When we hear the complaint it makes us nervous and we do not want to be alone in our anxiety so we spread it around us. There are not enough meat balls in the spaghetti. Now others are in agreement with us so we are less anxious. There is cohesiveness. Murmuring and arguing attempts to create cohesion to spread out anxiety until finally most of the church body is upset because now we all know there are not enough meat balls in the spaghetti. Maybe there is. Maybe there isn't. It is insignificant. What is

significant is following the lessons of the Bible. What we should do whenever we hear murmuring or see arguing is to redirect that person to biblical lessons.

The Apostle Paul teaches doctrine and doctrine is the most significant thing. It is not just a matter of pledging to stop murmuring and arguing, or whatever issue you may be facing. Doctrine teaches us that it is a matter of focus. As a child of God, you are to be without blemish and shine within a corrupt world. You do this by holding on to the word. All Christians should live by the Bible. The New Testament division that the Apostle Paul is addressing is the perception that righteousness is based on law. The Apostle Paul's doctrine is that righteousness is based on the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we live a life of righteousness. The letter is a letter of joy and the Apostle Paul calls upon the church to rejoice along with him, and maintain unity by standing firm in faith, standing firm in doctrine, and standing firm in the Lord.

Our Scripture today is part of Paul's advice. His emphasis is on human collaboration with God. Whenever people are divided and argue, it goes against the will of God. Then and now people live in a bad environment and seek their own interests instead of those of Jesus Christ. But just like Jesus teaches "you are the light of the world" we are to shine like stars. You are to be the shining example for others to follow. This means that you are to be blameless with no murmuring and no arguing. We achieve this by holding fast to the word.

The Apostle Paul's situation is that he is in prison. He says in verse 17 But even if I am being poured out as a libation over the sacrifice and the offering of your faith (NRSV). So, he is saying that even if he himself is the sacrificial offering for them for their faith, then he is glad and rejoices with them. So, no matter how bad things are for him, he is glad to offer himself for them. So, be glad and rejoice with him.

This is a message of unity; one spirit and one purpose. It is not a matter that we are to focus on everyone getting along. It is that we are all united as one when we are united in Christ. If we are all like Christ, then we all get along. Murmuring, conflict, division, and arguing, all come from transgression from the will of God. Division comes from not being one with Christ, and not being true to your calling and public confession of faith. The attitude of Christ is oneness, togetherness, and humility. No matter what happens, no matter how bad things are, I call upon you to celebrate with me our oneness and togetherness.