

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

January 2, 2022

Joy to the World
Philippians 1:1-11
A Joyful Prayer for the Church
Rev. Mike Toluba

Mike and I are so excited about this new series in the book of Philippians. We had to brainstorm like crazy to come up with the name of this series - Joy to the World! Not really, it was totally a Holy Spirit moment. We sing this song every year at Christmas. Joy to the World is actually tied with Hark the Herald Angels Sing as my all-time favorite Christmas hymns! You know these words:

Joy to the world! The Lord is come. Let earth receive her King!
Let every heart prepare him room.
He rules the word with truth and grace.
The glories of his righteousness and wonders of his love.

Christmas does not end when we unwrap all the presents under tree. King Jesus changes everything. This spirit of joy will continue with us as we go on this journey through the book of Philippians.

Philippians is actually referred to as Paul's joy letter. This letter is a personal letter to the Philippians. It was not intended for general circulation to all the churches like the letter to the Ephesians. Paul wanted to thank the believers in Philippi for helping him when he had need. Paul also wanted to tell them why he could be full of joy despite being in prison.

The Roman colony of Philippi was located in Northern Greece which was called Macedonia in Paul's day. This was a thriving commercial center at the crossroads between Europe and Asia. In about 50 AD, Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke crossed the Aegean Sea from Asia Minor at Troas and landed at Philippi (See Acts 16:11-40). The church in Philippi consisted mostly of Gentile believers. Since they were not familiar with the Old Testament, Paul did not specifically quote any Old Testament passages in this letter. Paul is writing this letter probably about 10 years after coming to Philippi on his second missionary journey. Here is how he begins his letter to the Philippians.

This letter is from Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus. I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus, including the church leaders and deacons. May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy, for you have been my partners in

spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now. And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

So it is right that I should feel as I do about all of you, for you have a special place in my heart. You share with me the special favor of God, both in my imprisonment and in defending and confirming the truth of the Good News. God knows how much I love you and long for you with the tender compassion of Christ Jesus.

I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return. May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God.

Philippians 1:1-11 New Living Translation

Paul is particularly fond of the church at Philippi, because Paul very much sees them as partners in spreading the Good News. It has been a long-term relationship of at least 10 years. Remember Paul first came to Philippi in 50 AD, and Paul is writing this letter around 61 AD while in prison. Traditionally, we think of that imprisonment in Rome. However, Paul mentions in Philippians 1:26 about coming to visit Philippi again. Some New Testament scholars think could have been writing to the Philippians from prison in Ephesus before being imprisoned in Rome.

When people were put in prison during the first century, they were not normally given food by their jailers. People in prison had to rely on others helping them. The believers in Philippi could have raised money and gone on a dangerous journey to bring these resources to an imprisoned friend. It speaks volumes for the esteem and love they held for Paul.

Part of Paul's joyful prayer for the church today is the calling us to be partners in the Gospel together. I love how our church staff and leaders work so closely together here at Killlearn. We do not have the mindset of ministry to be done by our church staff alone. There are so many volunteers here at our church that do so many things to share the love of Jesus with others. We are truly partners in the Gospel together. One of the reasons that we take an offering every week in worship is to practically live into this partnership for the Gospel together and to support the work of ministry together.

Another major theme of this first chapter of Philippians is about how God, who began the good work within you, will finish what He started. The gospel message is not supposed to be a flashy religious experience that might fade away over time. If there is

genuine faith in Jesus, then the gospel calls us to genuine loyalty to King Jesus as the Lord of our lives. God desires his saving grace to be the ultimate difference maker in our life every day.

We had a three wonderful times of worship here on Christmas Eve. It was the most people that I have experienced worship here at Killearn since last Easter. It always feels different in worship for me when there are so many people who are excited to be here together. One of the most heartbreaking things that I feel every year is that so many people come to worship or do worship online for Christmas and Easter, but they do not worship God most other Sundays. It is almost like many people believe in Jesus but not so many people are interested in following King Jesus to be the Lord of their lives. It's like we prepare a little room in our heart for those high holy days, but God wants to be live in our hearts all the days of our life.

Do you sometimes feel as though you are not making progress in your spiritual life? When God starts a project, God completes it. God will help you grow in grace until God has completed His work in your life. When you are discouraged, remember that God will not ever give up on you. God promises to finish the work he has begun. When we feel incomplete, unfinished, or stressed, remember that God's promises are true. Don't let your present circumstances rob you of joy - the joy of knowing Jesus and the joy of growing closer to Jesus. Don't give up on God - God is never giving up on you!

Our passage from Philippians 1 ends with Paul's prayer for a joyful church. Let's explore three key elements of Paul's prayer in verses 9-11. What if we thought about this prayer as our prayer for our church family?

First, **Paul prays that their love will overflow in knowledge and understanding.** We often do not think of love in this way. We usually think of love with emotion and affection and even compassion. For Paul, this understanding of love is all bound together. What we call the heart and what we call the head were not separated. If Christian love is genuinely true love for God and true love for another, then love is bound to work its way out in knowledge and understanding. This kind of knowledge is a deep insight into the way God's world truly is. A knowledge open to everyone who is prepared to give themselves wholeheartedly in love to God through King Jesus.

Secondly in verse 10, **Paul prays that this wise love will result in moral discernment.** Paul wants us to understand what really matters, so each of us might live pure and blameless lives until the day King Jesus returns. The believers in Philippi lived, as we do, in a world where several moral issues were blurred and distorted. It was often hard to see what the right thing to do was. Paul longs to see them grow in telling the difference between good and evil, when so often, they appear as shades of grey. This letter has quite a lot to say about the coming day of Christ's return. The main thing to remember is that Christians can look forward to the return of Jesus with confidence and joy.

Finally, **Paul prays that they may be filled to overflowing with the fruit of right living.** The word for right living is another one of Paul's big words - often translated as righteousness. It sometimes means God's own faithfulness, and sometimes the status of membership in God's family. Here its emphasis is more on our own behavior which results from both God's faithfulness and our status of being forgiven members of God's family. In every stage of our faith journey, when people first hear the gospel, when they believe it, when we begin to live by it, and when we make progress in faith and love - nothing is done to our own glory. Everything is done through Jesus and to the glory and praise of God.

Paul's prayer for the church at Philippi is a prayer for us at Killearn United Methodist Church. It's also a prayer that every follower of Jesus can use. The reason you are praying at all is that God has begun his good work in all of us. Whatever God begins, God always completes it. God rules the world with truth and grace. One of the greatest wonders of God's love is on full display as we experience God's grace at the Communion table. Let us prepare our hearts to make room for Jesus and the joy that Jesus brings to each of us and to the whole world.

Icebreaker I – When was the last time you received a letter in the mail?

Icebreaker II – What is your favorite Christmas hymn?

1. What one word best describes Paul's feelings for the Philippians?
2. What word would describe the feelings you have for your church?
3. What is unusual about Paul's positive attitude in the letter?
4. On a scale of 1 (easy) to 10 (hard), how difficult is it for you to express your feelings like Paul did?
5. How is God at work in a believer's life according to verse 6? “⁶ *And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.*”
6. How is God at work in a believer's life according to verses 9 – 11? “⁹ *I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding.* ¹⁰ *For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return.* ¹¹ *May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ[®]—for this will bring much glory and praise to God.*”

7. How does the above verses make you feel about uncertainties in your life?
8. Who was the “Apostle Paul” in your spiritual life, who introduced you to Jesus Christ and cared about your spiritual growth?
9. Who is your spiritual cheerleader now?
10. How can this group pray for you this week?