

Tamworth City Uniting Church

Worship on 11th October 2020



Acknowledgement of Country

As you enter this time of worship please acknowledge the custodianship of this land by the Gamilaroi peoples - the traditional owners of this land, and pay respect to their elders – past and present.

Call to Worship

Come all you people, come and praise your maker.
Rejoice in the Lord always,
for the Lord is near.
Come people of God.
Come and praise your maker!

Song *All things praise you, Lord most high*

All things praise you, Lord, most high, heaven and earth, and sea and sky;
all were for your glory made, that your greatness thus displayed
should all worship bring to you: so we praise you, Lord, anew.

All things praise you – night to night sings in silent hymns of light;
all things praise you – day by day chants your power in burning ray;
time and space are praising you: so we praise you, Lord, anew.

All things praise you, glorious Lord, great Creator, powerful Word,
omnipresent Spirit, now at your throne we humbly bow,
lift our hearts in praise to you: so we praise you, Lord, anew.

TiS 148 George W Conder. Public Domain

Prayers of Confession

Generous God we lift our voices in praise of you,
but we acknowledge that there are times when,
like the Israelites wandering in the wilderness, we complain.

(Silent reflection)

We hear your invitation to peace.

But we dare not stop to receive in case it upsets our lifestyle and the choices we make.

(Silent reflection)

We hear your invitation to rejoice and celebrate.

But sometimes, we want to put a damper on others celebrations, preferring instead, to be wet blankets – dousing joy, and life.

(Silent reflection)

Loving God, forgive us and bring us closer to you.

These prayers we pray in and through the name of Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Hear God's Word to us in Christ:

If we have faith as small as a mustard seed, God's power is released in us.

Our healing is a gracious gift.

Rise, take up your bed and walk. Amen!

The Epistle Reading *Philippians 4:1-9*

¹ Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

² I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³ Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵ Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹ Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Message

The Philippian church was no different to any of the other early churches – or indeed the churches of today. Its members needed to be encouraged in their Christian faith. They needed to be reminded of what was important as they sought to live their lives as followers of the way of Christ, and they also needed to be reminded about what their focus was. Our reading from Philippians brings together many of the important themes of Philippians as a whole. Let's look at three exhortations in the reading that come into this category. Paul's first exhortation comes in verse one where he says: 'Stand firm in the Lord.' These words could be said to summarize much of this letter to Christians at Philippi. Writing to them from prison and obviously concerned about their ability to withstand various pressures

without his presence Paul, at several points, implores the Philippians to steadfastness. Nothing should be allowed to undermine the faith that has nurtured and nourished them. One persistent threat to faithfulness and steadfastness is disunity, and so it is not surprising that the second exhortation Paul repeats is for unity. Earlier in the letter Paul urged that the Philippians be of the same mind and think of one another's interest. Here, that plea for unity becomes quite specific, as Euodia and Syntyche are the objects of concern. 'I urge you, Euodia and Syntyche, to be of the same mind in the Lord.' (verse 2) We don't know who these two women were, but it seems fairly obvious that they, and their circumstances, were known to Paul's readers – perhaps they were leaders in the Philippian congregation. It seems that they may have had some sort of disagreement and Paul is encouraging them of the need to reach a common mind.

The third exhortation that repeats earlier material in the letter culminates in the words: 'Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me.' (vs 8-9) If we read through Philippians we can see that throughout the letter Paul, both implicitly and explicitly, offered himself as an example to be imitated. His attitude toward his own imprisonment, his rejection of past values in favour of being filled with the gospel of Christ, his single-minded focus on the citizenship of heaven – all these are aspects of Paul's life that he offered the Philippians for their instructional value. In the same way, he sees in the story of Jesus, an example of obedience that instructs Christians in their own obedience.

These admonitions written by Paul almost two thousand years ago have, I believe, relevance for us today. For we too can allow things to undermine our faith: whether it be our reliance on things other than God; the fact that times like we are going through at the moment – for example the Coronavirus pandemic and all its implications and climate change can seriously make us question our faith and either ask where is God in all of this? or give up on God entirely. Through all of these challenges Paul invites us to remain steadfast in our faith – despite what life throws at us or entices us to follow.

We can, as a Christian community, also be driven apart from each other by differences of opinion or by not having things go the way we want them to go; by different backgrounds or different theologies. Paul's words to Euodia and Syntyche echo down to us today, 'reach a common mind'. I don't think this means we have to agree on everything. Rather – for the sake of the 'whole', let's come to a common understanding of what we should be on about. The third exhortation also speaks to us today: let's follow – let's imitate those faithful followers of Jesus, those teachers and preachers who have gone before us who have lived their lives knowing what it is to follow the way of Christ. Above all – let's take Christ as our main role-model.

Let's hear Paul's exhortations in this letter to that early church at Philippi and let's apply them to ourselves.

Further delving into the reading reveals that it introduces three themes that, while consistent with the rest of the letter, appear here for the first time. Like the words of exhortation, they are just as applicable to us today as they were to the Philippians.

Firstly: 'Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.' (verse 6)

Now this can be challenging! How many of us don't worry about anything? Even when we commit things to God through prayer, many of us still continue worrying about the stuff that is going on in our lives, in the lives of those whom we love, in the lives of people throughout the world or in creation itself. And perhaps we have, in the past, turned our worries over to God only to find that things don't always turn out as we would like them to.

So what does it mean? I don't think it means that we won't be anxious or concerned about things. Indeed, if we read his other letters, Paul shows that he was concerned and anxious about the congregations he was involved with. Perhaps it means that we are not to let our

worries weigh us down to the extent that they become destructive. Or maybe we could look at it in the following light: I don't know about you but I find that when I talk with someone about stuff that is worrying me, the burden is lifted. A few weeks ago I was having a conversation with someone who had asked to have a chat with me about things going on in his life. At the end of our chat I said to him, 'I'm not sure I've helped all that much.' His response was: 'Just having someone really listen to me has been helpful.'

And I think it's like that with God. God invites us to chat with him or her - or however we see God, about our worries and cares. We do this in the knowledge that God is a God who loves us and cares for us. Just getting things off our chest can be really helpful. The outcome might not be what we would like it to be, but we can be assured that God loves us and cares for us and that provision of love, acceptance and care will never run out!

A second theme that both reinforces earlier parts of the letter and ties this chapter together is the theme of God's presence and nearness. In verse five we read 'And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus' and the passage closes with the words: 'the God of peace will be with you'. These are words of assurance and are connected with the exhortations that we looked at earlier. Steadfastness, unity, and reliance on God rather than on anxiety, are only possible for those who know that God will indeed be with them. Knowing that God is with us in everything – having a sense that God's presence lies deep within us, allows us to live lives in which God's peace and presence are evident in everything we do and say. Living in relationship with the God who engages with us brings meaning and substance – and above all, a deep sense of peace.

The third theme concerns joy. In this passage we read the words: 'Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, rejoice.' Earlier in the letter Paul expresses the joy he has received from the Philippians – and indeed the gospel itself. Here he is encouraging the Philippians to have that same joy.

I don't know about you but we Christians can sometimes present an image of controlled joyfulness. We can be so serious about our faith that sometimes any sort of joy gets sidelined and often frowned upon. We don't always celebrate in ways that allow our joy to be seen in all its fullness. Having joyful emotions is part of who we are as human beings – just as pain and fear is part of life.

I don't think Paul is saying we must put on a happy, smiley face all the time and be glad and joyful about everything that happens to us. To do this would be taking his words at a very superficial level. Rather for Paul, his joy came from knowing that he belonged to Christ – so that even in those tough, painful times – and he had many of them, he could, at a deep level rejoice that God was with him in everything.

So too can we knowing that God's love is with us in every situation that comes our way gives us good reason to celebrate.

I pray that this week we will reflect on this passage and listen to what God might be saying to us.

Song *This is all our joy*

*Something we have known from the beginning,
that we have seen with our own eyes:
the Word of life from whom all living takes its voice and cries.
This is all our joy in Christ.*

God is light, in God there is no darkness.
God is love and if we live in God, love will be our promise.

Something we have known

See the love of God we have been given!
We are called God's children and in love, that is who we are.

Something we have known

Let us love, for this is God's own being.
God in Christ, has shown us how to love, living for each other.

Something we have known

Robyn Horner. Copied under CCLI Worship Licence No. 604439

Prayers of the People

(Prepared by Rob Duns)

Dear Loving God, the one who loved us even before we were born.
You shower us with so many blessings, we live an abundant life.
In you Lord we can find love, warmth, compassion, understanding and acceptance.
You offer us forgiveness, you offer us the inheritance of Heaven.

We struggle in humility to understand that we are all precious in your eyes, Lord.
We know that you have a deep caring love for each and everyone of us.

We pray that we can have the eyes to see what we have been given, by you.
The gentle touch of a friend. The delightful outdoors. The brilliance of autumn colours.
A sun shower. A spectacular sunset. A mother's care, a lover's passion.
A moment of solitude, an inspiration, a gripping book.
Having a good laugh with friends. Receiving an unexpected gift.
Getting involved in a worthwhile, stimulating project.

Worship, play, prayer, silence, work, love, peace, friendship, family are all there.
In allowing our minds to wander over the many facets of our lives, we cannot but be amazed.
Here are the marks of love, the signs of goodness and the indications of grace.

So, let us take time to see with our eyes, feel in our hearts and to appreciate what has been given to us. So often, we fail to see the goodness around us, whilst comparing ourselves to others and wishing for more.

Let our lives enjoy what has already been placed in our hands.
Don't let our appreciation only be an afterthought, but let us celebrate the present, and thank the Giver.

Live, with a sense of amazement, that so much has been given. Let us celebrate what has been placed into undeserving hands.

But still, at this time, we think of those who are alone, lonely, grieving and suffering financially at this time. The effects of the Coronavirus pandemic are so widespread and ongoing at this time.

We pray for the leaders and governments of all nations in the coming year, that wisdom, integrity and courage will enable them to rise above their own preferences and prejudices – and that they can work for the greater good, for peace and understanding. We pray for consensus and acknowledgement of the man-made causes of climate change and that they can show true leadership in efforts mitigate the massive challenge of climate change that is affecting all.

As individuals and as a church, help us to plan effectively for the best use of our resources. We pray for our church that it remains focused and relevant at this time. We give thanks and appreciation to Rev Betty Stroud, who has ably led us in worship over the past months.

We pray to you for those who are in poor health at this time.
We bring to you now our personal prayers for those in need of your comfort and loving
grace.....

(Silent prayer)

Dear Lord hear our prayers. Amen.

As our Saviour Christ has taught us, we are confident to say:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your Name.
Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us in time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen

Song *Make me a channel of your peace*

Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there is hatred let me bring your love;
where there is injury, your pardon, Lord;
and where there's doubt, true faith in you.

*O Master, grant that I may never seek
so much to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved, as to love with all my soul.*

Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope;
where there is darkness, let me bring your light;
and where there's sadness, ever joy.

O Master

Make me a channel of your peace.
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
in giving of ourselves that we receive,
and in dying that we're born to eternal life.

TiS 607 Based on an anonymous prayer by J S Templehoff

Blessing

This week may you be blessed by the peace that God gives,
the joy that you can know in Christ,
and the encouragement and steadfastness that the Spirit inspires.
Amen.