

February 23

2.23.20 - Philippians 1:3-11 “Profound Partnerships”

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The Lord be with you. Well, we have already heard a lot of words this morning and it has been good. And now we come to the sermon which comprises even more words! And I am mindful that in this visual day and age, we have a saturation point for words. So this morning I’m going to be brief and to the point.

Conference is encouraging us to think about Paul’s relationship to the church / his friends as a way that we might be of encouragement to one another in our Conference setting. This text that we just heard is incredibly dense with nuanced meanings of greek words that we could easily get lost in. But there is really just one thing that I want to highlight this morning that I think is important.

It deals with the word “Koinonia” which we often understand as fellowship but is used in this passage as partnership. The basic idea is that of having something in common or jointly. “I give thanks to my God for every remembrance of you, always praying with joy for all of you in my every prayer, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.” – Philippians 1:3-5

The reason Paul bubbled over with positive feelings for the Philippians was related to the way that the Philippians had chosen to partner with Paul in the gospel.

Partnerships can make or break your relationships with other Christians. Why? Because we Christians are so different from one another. Every Christian is different and unique. And sometimes we let those differences get in the way. But there are no identical cookie cutter Christians in this church and there are

no cookie cutter churches in Indiana Michigan conference. We have different personalities, different backgrounds and life experiences, and even different convictions as we read and interpret scripture together.

A visual image would be to think about how many miles there are between the furthest most northern IN/MI Conference churches in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan down to the southernmost church in Kentucky. Conference tells us that there are 850 miles between them.

But I’ve always found it more helpful to lay it out from west to east. It is 685 miles from here in Goshen to New York City. That means you have to go yet, another 160 some miles which plops you out the Atlantic Ocean to match that distance. Think about the all the differences in cultures and understandings in people and churches as you move west to east let alone from north to south.

We are different. But as Christians we don’t have to have uniformity in order to have unity. Unity comes as we partner with other individuals and churches for the good news of grace that has been given to us in Christ Jesus.

To say it another way, we don’t have to have everything in common or the same in order to be partners. That is, we don’t have to be uniform, the same. But we do have to hold in common, who we are and what God has given us so that we might participate as partners. And here a couple of examples come to my mind. We always talk about, or like to think of ourselves as being willing to share our stuff. But how about putting it in black and white.

When I started at Sunnyside years ago, I opened up the directory and in the back, beyond the listing of house and phone

numbers, beyond the listing of committees and other relevant information of the structure of the church was another list; a list of stuff, stuff that people owned with names behind it. You needed a truck, call so and so. You needed a ladder, this is the person who has one. Need a saw, a canner, a drill, a generator.... This is the person to call.

Uniformity says that we all have to have the same stuff in order to participate as partners. Unity simply says that we have to be willing to gently hold in common what have, who we are, where we are at in order to make real the gospel of grace that we are partners in. I don't know about you but I find that to be a much more powerful witness than when we are all the same. There is something powerful about unity in the midst of diversity.

Another example. I stand before you, a pastor who was the recipient of a scholarship, a chunk of money from a congregation that paid for much of my tuition at seminary. It was, in a word, a huge blessing. Okay, that's three words but you get the picture. I wasn't the only one. There were others before and after me who received this gift from this scholarship fund.

Now, did this church do this so that it would personally benefit from it? Did I ever go and become their pastor? No. I did not. But I did have the privilege to preach there once, and that was for my mother in law's funeral.

For me it was a powerful event on multiple levels. But for this morning, in relation to Paul's letter, here is why. The good work that they did, contributed to the good work that God was doing in me which in turn has contributed for many years now, to the good work that God has done and continues to do in others through me, I hope, as a minister of the gospel. They partnered with me and I remember them with joy for we have

partnered in the gospel of grace. We each offered what we had in that moment, and God blessed it.

And here is something else that I think is quite profound. When my personal relationships with other Christians become partnerships I experience fellowship in a different way. I remember, I perceive things in a different way. I find that it matches what Paul is saying here.

- When a relationship becomes a partnership our minds tend to be filled with good thoughts, things like gratitude and joy (v.3).
- When a relationship becomes a partnership our hearts are filled with tender affection toward others (v. 7-8).
- And when a relationship becomes a partnership our prayers are filled with joy and hope (v. 9-10).

"I am sure of this, that the One who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." – Philippians 1:6. I am sure of it too. It is a part of my life, my very being. I pray that it will be for you and for us as a congregation as well. And this is why we are a part of Indiana Michigan Conference; a partnership of churches, of congregations proclaiming and working and walking with one another so that we might live into the gospel of God's grace. The unity of profound partnerships that give testimony to God's power and grace at work in this world. Praise be to God.