



July-August 2015 Message for Congregations and Lay and Rostered Leaders

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ –

I thank my God every time I remember you... (Philippians 1:3).

This year I am inviting you to reflect on portions of Paul's letter, *to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi (1:1b)*, as you gather for church council, adult study, youth group, coffee group and are engaged in learning, discernment and reflection together. Relying heavily on the writings of Fred Craddock and of David Lose, each article will include a brief reflection on a Scripture passage, questions for reflection and discussion, and a prayer. I encourage you, as we begin, to read Paul's letter in its entirety in one sitting; remembering as you read that this is a letter – of Paul – to a church.

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Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. Only let us hold fast to what we have attained.
Philippians 3:13-16

Imprisoned with little to no hope of release, separated from his friends by distance and time, and unable to see with confidence when this condition might end, Paul isn't even remotely daunted but instead strains forward to embrace a freedom few can even imagine let alone grasp.

How?

Because Paul knows that he has been claimed by God. That his life is caught up in Christ. That he has been called by the God who created light from darkness and raises the dead to new life.

Paul, that is, has seen the end of the story – and it is a good end – and therefore he can work and struggle and plan and laugh and endure the present challenges with courage.

It comes down finally, I think, to vision. Or, really, to the eyes. Paul keeps his eyes fastened on the goal placed in front of him, the heavenly call of God to proclaim the gospel of Christ. All else becomes secondary.

Paul is not the only Christian to experience the kind of confidence that comes from keeping your eyes on the heavenly prize. Do you remember the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on the eve of his assassination? They reflect the same courage as that of the Apostle:

Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land! And so I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man! Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!!

And here's the thing: this kind of courage...is available to any of us.

Read and Reflect: Philippians 3:13-16

Discuss and Reflect:

What in this reading leads you to say, "I wonder about...", or, "I noticed..."

Comment on the following: *Paul, that is, has seen the end of the story – and it is a good end – and therefore he can work and struggle and plan and laugh and endure the present challenges with courage.*

Comment on the following: *It comes down finally, I think, to vision.*

Share together of others who have influenced you and/or your faith community because of their courage and confidence.

Pray together: *Gracious God, keep us steadfast in your promises so that whether we are experiencing joy or sorrow in the present our confidence in you and hope for the future remains strong. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen (Philippians 4:23).

The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13).

In Christ Jesus –

Shalom,

+Larry

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Spirit -Led Leadership - Hope-Filled Discipleship - Innovative Tradition - Collaborative Partnerships