October 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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Let your gentleness be known to everyone.   Philippians 4:5a

"Gentleness" is one of those words I'm not completely sure what to do with.

It's not that I don't have any idea what it means; it's more that it feels like its meaning has been narrowed by our popular use of the word. We want to find a laundry detergent that is gentle on our clothing, a soap that is gentle to our skin. We want grandmas to be gentle and we sing that baby Jesus was sweet, gentle, and kind.

So what does it mean, then, for us to "let our gentleness be known to everyone"? I worry that when a lot of us hear this we think it means that Christians should be vanilla – you know, not causing a stir. Or worse, we take this as an invitation to be milquetoast, to be a doormat, never complaining, letting others walk all over us.

The Greek word Paul uses can certainly be translated as gentle and mild, but it can also be translated as lenient, fair, equitable, suitable, and reasonable.

That changes things a bit for me.

 It's like Paul is saying, stay confident even when things are difficult. Or, be reasonable with everyone. Or, as Eugene Peterson translates it in *The Message*, "Make it as clear as you can to all you meet that you're on their side, working with them and not against them."

That makes more sense to me. That one product of our joy in the Lord – of knowing God's grace and being able to share it with others – is a certain confidence about our life and our relationships, a reliable

trust in God that allows us to be fair, to be reasonable, to be kind to others rather than imagine them as competitors or, perhaps worse, as a means to an end.

That strikes me, in fact, as a potentially strong witness to what it means to be a Christian: to so trust God with our lives and future what we can be fair, be reasonable, be on side of those around us. Why? Because God has promised us the future, which frees us to spend ourselves generously and confidently in the present.

Read and Reflect: Philippians 4:5a
Discuss and Reflect:
>   What in this reading leads you to say, "I wonder about…", or, "I noticed…"
>   Comment on the following: *The Greek word Paul uses can certainly be translated as gentle and
>   mild, but it can also be translated as lenient, fair, equitable, suitable, and reasonable.*
>   Comment on the following: *…as Eugene Peterson translates it in* The Message*, "Make it as clear
>   as you can to all you meet that you're on their side, working with them and not against
>   them."*
>   Share what it means to you that: *God has promised us the future, which frees us to spend
>   ourselves generously and confidently in the present.*

Pray together: *Gracious God, so root us in trust in you that we worry less about ourselves and our future and instead give ourselves to serving others. 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