



June 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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Yet whatever gains I had these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. Philippians 3:7

This is the pivot point in this section of Paul’s letter.

He is making a sharp turn, moving from warning about the false confidence his opponents are offering to encouraging the Philippians to lay hold of the true confidence one can have in Christ. And to do that, Paul gets personal, contrasting what he once thought was important and mattered to what he now values.

In the previous section, Paul listed all his reasons for “confidence in the flesh” – that is, all the ways in which he honored the old covenant, participated fully in it, and excelled in its requirements. It’s easy to read this as a “that was then” kind of story, assuming that while biographically interesting because it tells us more about Paul, it’s not all that relevant to us today.

But what, exactly, were the things that gave Paul confidence? His background, his training, his experience, his accomplishments. And when you put it that way, you realize that we are not all that different. We, too, are tempted to bolster our confidence about ourselves by checking things off our list or keeping a running tally of what’s going right in our lives, of what we’re accomplishing, or what we’re earning. The methods vary – how much money we make, what schools we went to, a recent compliment someone gave us, how well our kids are doing at school or sports, the new car we drive or latest computer tablet we just bought – but in the end they all come down to the same thing: we establish our sense of ourselves in terms of who we are and what we have done.

And it’s this – this penchant for evaluating and establishing our worth in terms of what we have done – that Paul now counts as loss.

Any chance we could do that?

To understand Paul's motivation – and what he believes he gained in return – we'll have to read a little further.

Read and Reflect: Philippians 3:1b-7

Discuss and Reflect:

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

Comment on the following: *...what, exactly, were the things that gave Paul confidence? His background, his training, his experience, his accomplishments.*

Comment on the following: *...we are not all that different. We, too, are tempted to bolster our confidence about ourselves by checking things off our list or keeping a running tally of what's going right in our lives, of what we're accomplishing, or what we're earning.*

Comment on the following: *The methods vary...but in the end they all come down to the same thing: we establish our sense of ourselves in terms of who we are and what we have done. And it's this – this penchant for evaluating and establishing our worth in terms of what we have done – that Paul now counts as loss.*

In what ways do we do this as individuals...and as communities of faith?

Pray together: *Gracious God, remind us that we are not merely the sum of our accomplishments and possessions but instead are your beloved children. Help us to see others as your beloved children too. 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