

## Summing It All Up, Friends

Philippians 4: 1-9

Near the end of his life, the apostle Paul wrote to his dear friends in the church at Philippi. Philippi was a Roman colony and the site of the first Christian Church in Europe. This was a very encouraging letter and contained a summary of a lifetime of advice and guidance. Paul wrote:

Celebrate God all day, every day. Revel in God! Make it as clear as you can to all you meet that you're on their side, working with them and not against them. Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life.

Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious – the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse. Do that, and God, who makes everything work together, will work you into his most excellent harmonies.

Advice is not always wanted or appreciated. Sometimes, however, advice is a precious treasure. This letter may be last of Paul's authentic letters in the New Testament. Paul started the church in Philippi and always cherished them. Near the end of his life, possibly in prison, Paul writes a short letter – short for Paul. As translated into English and divided into chapters and verses, it last four chapters. After two chapters, he says, "Finally" then writes two more chapters.

He tells them he loves them and gives them the precious treasure of a lifetime of wisdom. He sums it all up – a lifetime of experience, devotion, and ministry. Think about things that are good and noble, positive, worth thinking about. This is much more than the power of positive thinking. This is dwelling on what experience tells you is solid, good, and noble. Think about what you know for sure is right in your life. Consider what you do that really builds up other people and helps yourself.

Using theological language, Paul counsels, "Trust where you have experienced God's blessing. Think about what you do that you know, deep inside, God blesses? Trust that almost intuitive knowledge. The Apostle advises that this is the way to find vision, to find direction. "Do this, and God, who makes everything work together, will work you into God's most excellent harmonies".

We're buying a building here at Crossroads Church. This process has prompted a good deal of talk about vision. What is our vision? Around a building, what is it we want to do and to be as church that the right building will help and the wrong building inhibit?

If I understand Paul's advice to the Philippians, and perhaps his advice to us, it is to pay attention to our experience of God and our experience of being church. Dwell on the good, positive, and noble ways God has blessed this body in being church.

What I see a. from my perspective as pastor and as a member of this congregation, yet also an outsider since I have not shared much of the history that is common to many of you. I see our vision in two primary areas. The first is community.

Community involves worship. This is not a matter of style, but of passion and energy – what worship means to you. This includes even how you sometimes argue about it. Worship is an important facet of community

Our congregational governance is another important facet of community. This is the aspect of our how we talk with each other, and sometimes at each other. Governance represents our commitment to listening for the prophetic voice among us. It reflects our commitment to discern the Spirit's movement.

Community as vision includes small groups, share and care groups, study groups. It includes old groups and new groups, and some groups nobody knew existed! It includes Sunday School for young and not-so young. It includes e. Youth mission trips and the whole process of shaping future members, and developing multiple generations of disciples.

Community as vision involves music and drama. That includes the choirs we have every special season and the Grace Notes (Women's Ensemble). It includes drama products such as *Godspell* and *Joseph* as well as open mike events and the coffee house idea, cabarets, and the dramas we include during worship.

Our vision in terms of community includes the ways we care for each other. At a recent funeral within the congregation, there was tremendous support (lots of food provided). There is the Congregational Care team and the ministry of greeters. Food and hospitality ministries (notes and cards and expressions of solidarity) have been and will be important expressions of community.

The second primary area of vision I have seen involves seeking and following the Spirit's leadership. Our identity statement says that we seek "To live and serve in the Spirit". This is very true and has found expression through theological exploration in study groups and the Faith Dialogues meetings.

We are seeking the Spirit through partnership missions in Guatemala and in the Wayne Street partnership just a few blocks from here. The Spirit leads us to be advocates for justice in the larger community. We stand for justice by being welcoming in our body and also by speaking out against bigotry and for a more inclusive society.

Paul tells us we can often see where we need to go by looking back in order to look forward. We can find our direction by clarifying our experience and our passion. When you look at our experience as a church, what do you see? What do you envision for this church?

[At this point, the congregation literally talked with each other about perceptions of the past and ideas about the future. There was some sharing with the whole body]

The same truth that we have begun to recognize for us as a congregation is equally true for you as an individual in terms of your life vision. What do you know for

sure is right in your life? What do you do that really builds up other people and helps yourself? What do you do that you know deep inside God blesses? These are the visions to which God calls you in your life. These are the tasks to which to commit yourself and begin doing now, or continue doing now.

Thank you, God, for the passions of our lives and the experiences of what is good and noble and positive. Let us meditate on these things and see them as the pathway to the future of our lives. Amen.

## **Philippians 4: 1-9**

<sup>1</sup>My dear, dear friends! I love you so much. I do want the very best for you. You make me feel such joy, fill me with such pride. Don't waver. Stay on track, steady in God.

<sup>2</sup>I urge Euodia and Syntyche to iron out their differences and make up. God doesn't want his children holding grudges.

<sup>3</sup>And, oh, yes, Syzygus, since you're right there to help them work things out, do your best with them. These women worked for the Message hand in hand with Clement and me, and with the other veterans--worked as hard as any of us. Remember, their names are also in the book of life.

<sup>4</sup>Celebrate God all day, every day. I mean, revel in him! <sup>5</sup>Make it as clear as you can to all you meet that you're on their side, working with them and not against them. Help them see that the Master is about to arrive. He could show up any minute!

<sup>6</sup>Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. <sup>7</sup>Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life.

<sup>8</sup>Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious--the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse. <sup>9</sup>Put into practice what you learned from me, what you heard and saw and realized. Do that, and God, who makes everything work together, will work you into his most excellent harmonies.