

Sunday October 12/14

The setting for this passage is very interesting. At the time, Paul was in prison in Rome facing death. He got word that two women in the congregation in Philippi were in a nasty dispute. They were both respected leaders in the church so the effect on the whole community was devastating. Paul's reply clearly seeks to refocus them away from their battle to be right and back to the habits of a faith-filled life. They are urged to step away from all that is negative and embrace the positive. Sound familiar? Let's listen.

Philippians 4: 4-9

Celebrate God all day, every day. I mean, *revel* in him!

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! 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. 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.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

THANKS BE TO GOD!

Sermon – “Making THANKS a habit”

I wrote the introduction to that passage, early in the week and then I did more reading about that scripture reading and certainly the prevailing scholarship suggests that these 2 women who were kind of missionaries of Paul, working in Philippi, were in some sort of dispute with each other. Then I kept reading and found an interesting article, by David Fredrickson who teaches at Luther Seminary in Minneapolis, he is a New Testament scholar, so far more training than I have. He said maybe that's not true. Maybe these 2 women working at this church were not angry at each other, but maybe they were facing discrimination. It wasn't so much that they were women, the pattern of the leaders who had followed Paul, people that he had inspired into leadership roles, often came from the countryside and people in the country were very accustomed to have people help them out. So imagine growing up in Hamilton and arriving in Wellamport in my first church and people showing up with a chicken and a package of steaks but they were farmers and that was part of the welcome. When I planted my garden there had 2 farmers that offered me the very best manure! They delivered it and worked it in. The problems says Fredrickson is when these 2 women got into places like Phillippi, the cities, they had no means to support themselves. When they were in the countryside people gave them the things they needed. So what Fredrickson suggests is this message is a word of encouragement to these 2 women, to keep doing what they've been doing. Even though they are not getting the support they need, even though they are getting discouraged and should just stop this. It's an interesting twist, there are a lot things that I am thankful for today and we could have a very traditional 'Thanksgiving' kind of service, where we talk about our spouses, our family, our work and our homes etc. I want to tell you something that I'm thankful for, in addition to those things, especially today, because when I put my headphones on and went out with the dog bright and early this morning in the rain. I heard the latest news. When I got back from Sabbatical I had a stack of mail on my desk. I subscribe to the 'Christian Century' and the other magazine I subscribe to is 'Fortune'. As I was going through my fortunes I came across an article by Erica Fry. It was entitled "Macro how to stop eboli – It talked about the research being done in eboli and the success of the experimental drug Zemap, this is the drug that the 2 aid workers who were infected in Liberia and they were brought back and given this drug. They both survived and it changed everything. The article went on to say "The most fascinating thing... this drug had never been tested on people, so it was really an experiment to give it to these people. But the other fascinating thing, you may not know, that most of our vaccines are grown in eggs, which is the 'medium'. The problem with that is that a lot of people are allergic to eggs. So it means that a medicine that is supposed to keep you healthy can make you sick or you don't ever get the medication that can make you healthy. The researchers developing Zemap have been growing that medication in tobacco plants and they've been doing that at the National Virology lab here in Winnipeg. What that article did not say was that the American supply of Zemap had been contaminated and in fact there was no Zemap in the United States. The Zemap that saved those 2 aid workers, came from Winnipeg!!

Frank Plummer, Garry Colbinger are 2 of the amazing scientists working in our city and over the 7 years that I was on the Ethics Board for the Faculty of Medicine, when their research got to the human testing stage, I saw what they were up to. Some of the leading research in the creation of a truly successful Aids vaccine is happening right here in Winnipeg. They are in partnership with a large research study being done in Nigeria. What does this have to do with Paul's letter to the Philippian church? Paul's letter to those 2 women, in spite of things not going well, just keep doing what you know is right. Keep following my example, be steadfast even in the face of opposition, hang in there, stand by your principles, stick to your teaching. Well it made me think of those researchers, how many times do you get it wrong when you do research? How many times does your hypothesis not work? They don't stop, they keep going, they keep trying, they adjust, they look a little further. They consider that eggs are not perhaps the best medium for vaccines although it works really well. So what else can we use? So there they are, injecting eboli into tobacco plants. Finally something useful for tobacco plants! Who knew? It worked! People are alive because of that research! I also heard that an American nurse in Dallas treating that fella who had come over from Liberia, now has eboli! This is a huge worldwide crisis! It's going to cause all of us to wash our hands, take our temperature, and perhaps think twice about travel. The other thing I hope it does, is make us feel thankful. For people like the team here in Winnipeg, who against all the odds, keep doing what they're doing. That's what Paul was saying about life, perhaps he was saying it to those 2 women, who were leaders in the church and whether they were fighting with each other or whether facing the mountain top climb that seemed to be their work. Whatever the circumstances, the message is still a good one for Thanksgiving! Keep doing the good stuff, keep noticing the good things around you. Paul used himself as an example, do what you've learned from me, do what you've seen and heard in me. Don't stop, don't stop doing the good stuff. Some people have called these the habits of the heart, healthy spiritual, moral, intellectual practices. Whatever we call them, they are the things that make our lives better, and most definitely the things that transforms the lives of people around us. While I could have waxed gloriously about my loving husband, spending your anniversary on top of the Eiffel Tower... he's good for quite a while now! But that's very personal. I do hope that in the midst of all our personal things, we can step outside our immediate experience and look at what's going on in our world! That is so remarkable. Thank goodness there are people like those scientists. Making our world safer. I've been part of 4 or 5 studies in the polio vaccine because my mother had polio and she was determined that no one would have to go through that again. As each new vaccine was introduced through the late 50's and early 60's, the 5 Wilson kids were lined up!! So maybe we did help a little bit in that one. But the point is, look out, look beyond yourself, to the things that we can be thankful for, and the people who keep doing what they do. They are a blessing to us, they will be a blessing to our children and our grandchildren, and our grandchildren's children.