



Sermon Based Curriculum for Small Groups

24th September – 15th October 2023

INTRODUCTION

Paul's Letter to the Philippians was written to the first church that Paul established on European soil, in the Roman province of Macedonia. It was written while the apostle was in prison, and at a time when he was troubled by the opposition of other Christian workers towards himself and was distressed by false teaching in the church at Philippi. Yet this letter breathes a joy and confidence that can be explained only by Paul's deep faith in Jesus Christ.

The immediate reason for writing the letter was to thank the Philippian Christians for the gift which they had sent to help him in his time of need. He uses this opportunity to reassure them, so that they may have courage and confidence in spite of all his troubles and their own as well. He pleads with them to have the humble attitude of Jesus, rather than to be controlled by selfish ambition and pride. He reminds them that their life in union with Christ is a gift of God's grace which they have received through faith, not through obedience to the ceremonies of the Jewish Law. He writes of the joy and peace that God gives to those who live in union with Christ.

This letter is marked by its emphasis on joy, confidence, unity, and perseverance in the Christian faith and life. It also reveals the deep affection Paul had for the church at Philippi.

Romans may be divided up in the following way:

Introduction 1:1-11

Paul's personal circumstances 1:12-26

The life in Christ 1:27-2:18

Plans for Timothy and Epaphroditus 2:19-30

Warnings against enemies and dangers 3:1-4:9

Paul and his Philippian friends 4:10-20

Conclusion 4:21-23

YOUR PERSONAL DEVOTIONS DURING THIS TIME

We suggest that in your devotional times you prepare for the coming Sunday by reading the passages that will be read that day. It is best for you to design your own rhythm for doing this, but here is a suggestion:

- Monday = Philippians
- Tuesday = Old Testament
- Wednesday = Gospel
- Thursday = Psalm
- Friday = Philippians again
- Saturday = Gospel or Psalm again

In each week of this period the reading from Philippians is underlined because it is the ‘controlling lesson’. The other readings will be read through the lens that it provides. Alternatively, the other readings will help us to understand the controlling lesson.

Here are the lectionary readings for this period:

Sunday 24th September Twenty Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Exodus 16:2-15
Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45
Philippians 1:21-30
Matthew 20:1-16

Sunday 1st October Twenty Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Exodus 17:1-7
Psalm 78:1-4, 12-16
Philippians 2:1-13
Matthew 21:23-32

Sunday 8th October Twenty Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20
Psalm 19
Philippians 3:4b -14
Matthew 21:33-46

Sunday 15th October Twenty Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Exodus 32:1-14
Psalm 106:1-6, 19-23
Philippians 4:1-9
Matthew 22:1-14

STRUCTURE OF EACH WEEK’S STUDY

This booklet is laid out so that your gathering as a home group each week will follow the four W’s rhythm of Welcome, Worship, Word, Works. This year ‘works’ is a time of prayer for Trinity’s ministries. I hope this helps you and makes the journey meaningful. The times in brackets are a guideline that should help to keep you on track.

Welcome (10 minutes)

This is the time of fellowship, mutual concern and ‘catch up’ with each other.

Worship (10 minutes)

Read the Psalm for the week. Ask one person to read it slowly and prayerfully. As you listen to it allow this to be a moment of worship, love, devotion, adoration, thanksgiving and praise.

You can do your prayers of intercession for each other and society at this time, or at the end of the gathering.

Word (60 minutes)

Here I guide you through a Bible Study and a reflection on Sunday's sermon. I will also give some additional notes on the reading.

It is up to the group leader to decide whether there is enough time for all of the questions – and to select which questions to discuss if there are too many.

Prayer for Trinity (5 minutes)

This year we are asking for Home Groups and Classes to pray for specific aspects of Trinity's life. Suggestions for these prayers are given in the weekly notes.

Brett

Sunday 24th September 2023

Our Life in Christ # 1 **Joy in Philippians**

Welcome – A time of fellowship, mutual concern and 'catch up' with each other.

Worship – Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45

Word

1. Take some time to read the introduction to this booklet together. Allow this to lead to some discussion.
2. The guiding phrase for this week's reflection is: "Suffering can be redemptive". Discuss this as a group.

3. **Read Philippians 1:21-30.**

Here are further notes on this passage:

Paul is writing from prison, but he is full of joy. He knows that God is with him, and that God is working through his suffering for his good and for the good of others. This is a powerful reminder that no matter what we are going through, God is always with us.

- This passage is a reminder that our suffering can be redemptive.
- It is a call to joy, even in the midst of pain.
- It is a reminder of the power of prayer and community.
- It is a call to live our lives in love.

For us who read from a context of relative ease, these words are jarring. Paul writes from prison, uncertain whether he will die, hoping only that “Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death”. The circumstances have not dampened Paul’s joy. Perhaps they have even clarified his focus. Regardless, Paul’s words in this passage crystallise two of the greatest insights from Philippians.

The centrality of Christ (1:21-26)

Paul attributes Christ with the significance of all living: “For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain” (NRSV). The verse’s brevity, alliteration, and assonance (in Greek) make for an emphatic point — one the original hearers would have noticed.

Philippians squarely places Christ at the centre of everything:

- at the center of worthy pursuits (3:4b-14),
- at the center of thinking (2:5),
- at the center of ethical reflection (2:1-11),
- at the center of life (1:21-26), and at the center of worship (2:9-11).

A life reflective of the Gospel (1:27-30)

Paul begins to direct hearers toward specific behaviour from vs 27.

Paul’s positive spin on the Philippians’ suffering does not condone suffering of all kinds — nor does it attribute it to God’s will. His goal in Philippians 1:28-29 is for distressed believers in Philippi to see their

hardships for professing Christ as Lord as proof of the certainty of their future hope: salvation. Paul depicts this suffering for Christ's sake as a "privilege," given to accompany faith, probably because it fosters conformity to Christ, who himself suffered and was raised.

4. Which of the Sunday services did you attend or watch this past Sunday? What was the main point/s of the sermon?
5. Which part of the message touched you on a personal level?
6. How does this passage help me to understand the power of Joy in this world as explained by Paul?
7. What are the specific challenges that I have in living faithfully today that might be helped by this teaching?
8. What one crisis in the world today could be resolved by this teaching?

Prayer for Trinity:

Pray for:

Christ to be the centre of your life, to experience the Joy that Paul speaks of, even though he is in prison. Pray for your life to reflect the Gospels.

Sunday 1st October 2023

Our Life in Christ # 2
Confidence in Philippians

Welcome – A time of fellowship, mutual concern and 'catch up' with each other.

Worship – Psalm 78:1-4, 12-16

Word

1. The guiding phrase for this week's reflection is: " Let the same mind be in you that *IS* in Christ Jesus". Discuss this as a group.
2. **Read Philippians 2:1-13.**
Here are some further notes on this passage:

This great hymn to Christ is immediately followed by the ethical exhortation that grows from it. The hymn has described the dual movement both downward and upward, both humiliation and exaltation in the life of Christ. The downward movement was Jesus' choice in his life of obedience even down into death. The upward movement was God's response of exalting Jesus to the position of "Lord" or "Sovereign" "in heaven and on earth and under the earth."

What follows from that cosmic order for those who bear Christ's name is this: "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure." That is, as seen from below, our life is one of struggle and work, combining reverence ("fear") and eager anticipation ("trembling"). As seen "under the aspect of eternity," however, all this effort on our part is essentially "God at work in you."

The verb for "was" in Philippians 2:5 isn't really there in the Greek, making it unclear which verb to assume: "Let the same mind be in you that [was] [you have] in Christ Jesus ..." We are invited to look back at Christ's mind or we may possess the mind of Christ by virtue of our baptism. Another possibility is that we assume both translations would be accurate? The mind, the orientation, the way of being that was in Christ Jesus, is now in the body of Christ, the church. This is a startling assertion, and it compels us to measure up or at least interrogate our priorities. Churches continually urge congregations to be "in mission," to reach out, to advocate and care for the voiceless and powerless. If we do this outreach as persons who are manipulating the political realities of our age, is that the same manner of outreach that is meant to have the mind that was in Christ? This is what is meant by measuring. It is a plumb line, a yardstick, a means for holding a vision that can guide us as does the Good Shepherd's rod and staff of Psalm 23. It is a measure, even, that can comfort us.

3. Which of the Sunday services did you attend or watch this past Sunday? What was the main point/s of the sermon?
4. Which part of the message touched you on a personal level?

5. How does this passage help me to understand the power of Confidence in Jesus Christ as explained by Paul?
6. What are the specific challenges that I have in living with Confidence today that might be helped by this teaching?
7. What specific issues in the church generally should be resolved by this teaching?
8. What one area of your life could be changed by this teaching?

Prayer for Trinity (5 minutes)

Membership Portfolio

Pray for:

Pray for the upcoming New Member's Course on 19 October (consider attending to re-orientate yourself to Trinity ministries). Pray for Trinity's Welcomers at Sunday Services, that open invitation is made to all who visit services.

Sunday 8th October 2023

Our Life in Christ # 3

Unity in Philippians

Welcome – A time of fellowship, mutual concern and 'catch up' with each other.

Worship – Psalm 19

Word

1. The guiding phrase for this week's reflection is: "Faith is the language of trust". Discuss this as a group.
2. **Read Philippians 3:4b -14.**
Here are some further notes on this passage:
Paul recognises that things which he valued in the past, which gave him status, are no longer important to him. Not that Paul has left the past completely behind. He still argues from scripture like a Pharisee (that

is, as someone who is skilled in the study and use of scripture), he is still a member of the people of Israel; he is still zealous in his behaviour. What has changed for Paul is the standard by which he evaluates his life. For Paul, that standard is now his understanding of the life pattern established by Christ.

Faith is the language of trust, rather than intellectual assent. Paul recognises that his 'right standing' is the result of the faithfulness exercised by Christ on his life journey; because of this faithfulness, Paul is able to trust (have faith) in Christ. It is living into the faithfulness of Christ that enables Paul to view his past differently. For Paul, that means not clinging to the benefits of privilege; for others, who have never experienced privilege, it might mean claiming a heightened sense of self as a result of knowing themselves as persons with and in whom Christ dwells (3:12).

3. Which of the Sunday services did you attend or watch this past Sunday? What was the main point/s of the sermon?
4. Which part of the message touched you on a personal level?
5. How does this passage help me to understand the power of Unity and Trust as explained by Paul?
6. What are the specific challenges that I have in living in unity and trust today that might be helped by this teaching?
7. What specific issues in the church generally should be resolved by this teaching?
8. What one crisis in the church could be resolved by this teaching?

Prayer for Trinity

Prayer & Spirituality Portfolio

Pray for: Retreats past and present that the nearness of Christ through these will change the lives of people, That the organisers and writers of retreat and programme material will address the needs of the congregation.

Sunday 15th October 2023

Our Life in Christ # 4

Perseverance in the Christian Faith and Life

Welcome – A time of fellowship, mutual concern and ‘catch up’ with each other.

Worship – Psalm 106:1-6, 19-23

Word

1. The guiding phrase for this week's reflection is: "Our relationship with God through Jesus Christ". Discuss this as a group.

2. **Read Philippians 4:1-9.**

Here are some further notes on this passage:

Philippians 4:4-7 offers a helpful framework for exploring “joy” and “peace” in relation to the life of faith. Although the verses are grammatically structured as independent clauses, they are thematically inter-related. Considered as a whole, they suggest that the substance of joy and peace is found not so much in the emotions they evoke, as in the attitudes, behaviours, and relationships in which they are grounded.

In verse 4, Paul urges the Philippians to “rejoice in the Lord always.” The use of the present imperative signals that “rejoicing” is a habitual attitude that informs behaviour. The inclusion of the adverb “always” suggests “regardless of circumstances” (so 2 Corinthians 6:10). The critical phrase, however, is “in the Lord.”

Critical, here, is relationship: our relationship with God through Jesus Christ, but also our relationship in community. For Paul, “rejoicing” is cultivated through mutual support:

- “I am glad and rejoice with all of you — and in the same way you also must be glad and rejoice with me” (2:17-18; see also Romans 12:15).

- And, “I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me” (4:10; see also 1 Corinthians 16:17; 2 Corinthians 7:16).

This does not necessarily mean that everyone always agrees or gets along. Rather, it reminds us that each of us has a role to play in creating the supportive relationships that are the foundation of “joy” and a cause for “rejoicing.”

3. Which of the Sunday services did you attend or watch this past Sunday? What was the main point/s of the sermon?
4. Which part of the message touched you on a personal level?
5. How does this passage help me to understand Perseverance in the Christian Faith and Life as explained by Paul?
6. What are the specific challenges that I have to living with Perseverance in the Christian Faith and Life today that might be helped by this teaching?
7. How could your life be changed by this teaching?
8. What one crisis in the world today could be resolved by this teaching?

End this series in Prayer

Pray for: The Joy, Confidence, Unity, and Perseverance in the Christian Faith and Life that has been seen in Philippians, that each Home Group at Trinity will experience a closeness of God because of this Lectionary Series.