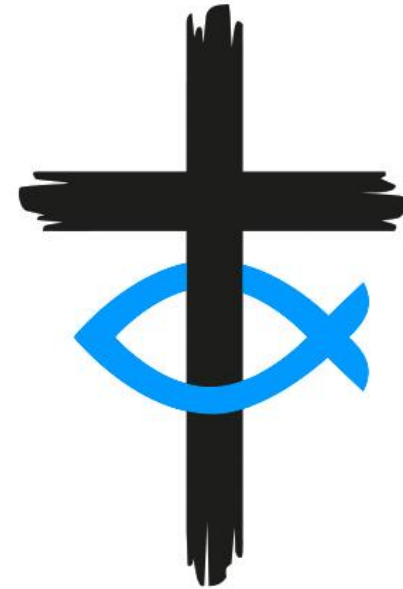


Daily Devotions from the URC
The Letter to the Philippians



Sunday 6th – Friday 25th October

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school. The only issue being that the adults organising the event felt the children should pay towards the cost. My wife Beryl, being Beryl, argued that as a reward the children should enjoy the treat free of charge as earlier treats for which a charge had been made had made a profit for the church, but the adults attending might pay a contribution to the costs. Her argument went down like a lead balloon. The attitude was one of protecting the financial status of the church rather than reach out in generosity to encourage the children to come to learn more about the love of Jesus.

Returning to Philippi, Paul concludes with greetings to members of that congregation. Especially, he greets Christians who were members of “Caesar’s household”, not his family, but members of the civil service. Clearly, Christians had infiltrated the highest authority in the land.

Prayer

Generous God, willing to even sacrifice Your Son at Calvary for the forgiveness of our weaknesses and sin. Help us to be generous to those who are both near and far away. May our actions be a reflection of your generosity to us, even though we don’t deserve it. Amen.

Monday 7th October

The Rev’d Peter Clark is the Minister of the Bridport & Dorchester Pastorate

Philippians 1:1 - 11

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God’s grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that on the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

Reflection

There’s a post that comes up periodically (and repeatedly) on social media entitled ‘Very British Problems’ which pokes gentle fun at our embarrassed approach to life, worrying unnecessarily and awkwardly about things that really don’t need to be worried about!

But another of the characteristics associated with our British mores that is valued still is politeness - a characteristic that, sadly and heartbreakingly, seems to have gone out of the window in many circumstances following the Brexit Referendum.

But politeness is far from a solely British characteristic and one that is clearly evident in all Paul's letters, even in his one to Galatian churches where he is about to set off both barrels of criticism. He starts by writing, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ ..."

But it's about more than politeness, it is about that word that is in both this and the Galatian letter, not to mention elsewhere in bucket-loads of Paul's writings. It is about Grace.

Approach people with grace and faithful love (characteristics that are massively evident in the works of God and in the words and actions of Jesus), and there is a more than average likelihood that they will listen, take on board what you say and act in, yes, a grace-filled and loving way. As Paul began his letter, that is what he was hoping anyway, so that the Philippians will indeed gather the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

As we begin to explore this beautiful, and beautifully written, grace-filled letter, may we gather some of that harvest too.

Prayer

God of grace, love and peace,
may we learn to control our urges to interrupt,
criticise and / or take umbrage.

As we greet, initiate and share all we know of
and understand about Jesus,
may we do so with mountains
of that same grace, love and peace.

Amen

Friday 25th October

The Rev'd Colin Hunt, retired minister, worshipping at Hutton & Shenfield Union Church, Essex

Philippians 4: 14 - 23

You Philippians indeed know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you alone. For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs more than once. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that accumulates to your account. I have been paid in full and have more than enough; I am fully satisfied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen. Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The friends[i] who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you, especially those of the emperor's household. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Reflection

Seemingly, Philippi had a reputation from the earliest days for their generation. Their generosity was seen by Paul as a sacrifice to God that Paul describes as "an odour of sweet savour", a description often used in the Old Testament to describe a sacrifice that was acceptable to God. (Genesis 8 v 21 and Leviticus 1v 9, 13, 17). Paul was pleased with the gift because their generosity was an expression of their love for others. It was not as if Paul either requested their help or even needed it.

It seems that in the 20th Century that the spirit of generosity had been lost. My wife tells the story of an experience she had as a teenager in the 1950's. The church she attended at that time had arranged an outing for the children as a reward for regular attendance at Sunday

appreciate and use all these gifts from God as they help us develop as loving persons. But if any of these gifts becomes the centre of our lives, then we hinder our growth towards our goal of loving God more and more. We need to sit lightly with worldly gifts, not allowing our desire for them to overwhelm our desire for God.

There are similar thoughts too in the Methodist Covenant service. All these words – of Paul, Ignatius and John Wesley are about a commitment to being disciples and putting God first in our lives and in everything about our lives – what we do, what we say and who we are. If we have found true love, then we love no matter what happens and always choose the better option for our love to thrive. It's all about trusting God who loves us to the uttermost.

Prayer

(One version of the Methodist Covenant prayer)

Lord my God, when your love spilled over into creation
you thought of me.

I am from love, of love, for love.

Let my heart, O God, always recognise and cherish
and enjoy your goodness in all creation.

Direct all that is in me toward your praise.

Teach me reverence for every person, all things.

Energize me in your service.

May nothing ever distract me from your love,
neither health nor sickness, wealth or poverty,
honour or dishonour, long life or short life.

Give me only your love and your grace – that is enough for me. Amen

Tuesday 8th October

The Rev'd Julian Macro, retired URC Minister, Member of Verwood URC

Philippians 1: 12 - 14

I want you to know, beloved, that what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to everyone else that my imprisonment is for Christ; and most of the brothers and sisters, having been made confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, dare to speak the word with greater boldness and without fear.

Reflection

The Apostle Paul is imprisoned. He was probably already in Rome though some scholars suggest that he was still in Ephesus when this letter was written. While Paul had deliberately, and willingly, used his Roman citizenship to achieve a transfer to the heart of the Roman Empire, we can be sure that his fellow Christian leaders and followers were distressed and disturbed that he was in prison and would, in all likelihood, be condemned to death; for them this was bad news. Paul assures them that what had happened had actually helped to spread the Gospel; as he had written to the Romans (8:28) "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God." We can accept this in theory, but how easy is it to accept it in practice? Circumstances, for example in health, relationships and life opportunities, for others and for ourselves, can turn out very differently from our hopes and expectations.

How do we respond when this happens? Even if we feel able to move on ourselves in the face of such disappointments and worse, it is so hard for sensitive people to accept that the suffering of others is "working together for good."

But Paul found that the example he gave and the opportunity to witness given to him in prison could be viewed positively and actually increased the confidence of his fellow Christians.

So, while not being insensitive to the problems and suffering of others, let us pray that God will give us the insight and strength to use whatever setbacks befall us as opportunities to witness to our faith and confidence in God's love and power.

Prayer

Through all the changing scenes of life,
in trouble and in joy,
the praises of my God shall still
my heart and tongue employ.
Of his deliverance I will boast,
till all that are distressed
from mine example comfort take,
and soothe their griefs to rest.

N Tate and N Brady, from Psalm 34

[Wednesday 9th October](#)

Daniel Harris, Ordinand, Westminster College

Philippians 1: 15 - 18

Some proclaim Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. These proclaim Christ out of love, knowing that I have been put here for the defence of the gospel; the others proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but intending to increase my suffering in my imprisonment. What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true; and in that I rejoice.

[Thursday 24th October](#)

The Rev'd Sue Henderson, retired URC minister, member of Central Bath URC.

Philippians 4: 10 - 13

I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress.

Reflection

We learn in these verses how pleased Paul was to receive the Philippians' gift and he reassures them that he knew he was in their thoughts and prayers even though they were not able to support him in other ways. He explains that he has learnt the gift of content in all situations. He no longer has earthly desires, but seeks only to serve God.

These words of Paul reminded me of the introduction to the Spiritual Exercises of the 16th Century Spanish priest and theologian, Ignatius of Loyola. These are a set of meditations and prayers written to help people discern the will of God in their lives. Here Ignatius said that all things in this world are gifts from God, given so that we may know God more and be more able to return the love that God has showered on us.

We know that everything we have comes from God – my tablet computer, my bank account, my job₃, my friends and family. So we

make a huge difference to world affairs, or even seem 'irrelevant', just imagine what would happen if every Christian in the world brought the message of the Gospel to just one other person.

Dr Sangster ends a chapter by saying: 'The Gospel is relevant. However irrelevant it has seemed [to others], it has proved itself in age after age of crisis to be matched to world need. Our business is to proclaim it.

The only question is 'How?'

We can only proclaim the Gospel to others if we seek and strive after it ourselves. We must, therefore, 'Keep on doing the things that we have learned and received and heard and seen ..., and the God of peace will be with us.'

Prayer:

God's word, for all their craft and force,
One moment will not linger,
But, spite of hell, shall have its course
'Tis written by His finger.
And though they take our life,
Goods, honour, children, wife,
Yet is their profit small;
These things shall vanish all,
The city of God remaineth.

'A safe stronghold our God is still, written by Martin Luther, tr. by Thomas Carlyle, Congregational Praise #485'

Reflection

Why do you believe in Jesus Christ?

Paul recognises that some Christians' personal agendas cruise far from the shores of altruism. Instead, they hold darker, and more nefarious, purposes for proclaiming the arrival of God's rule. Paul goes against the long-standing tradition of naming-and-shaming, and refuses to "call them out". Instead, he sees the bigger picture and celebrates that Jesus is being proclaimed.

But why do we believe? Is it for genuine reasons of piety, or is self-interest hidden within the folds of faith? Most of us probably oscillate somewhere between the two, thankful that God puts his divine treasure in us - these very earthy "jars of clay" (2 Cor 4.7). But it is clear that Paul is swaying a particular direction, excited about the unique mission opportunities that custody brings.

Without words, Paul appeals us to live out our faith at a higher level. He appeals to us to trust God despite opposition to his Kingdom's rule - even if it is coming from our fellow believers. This helps us to move through the very human reactions of such maltreatment and trust in God that his plans are, indeed, coming to fruition.

Prayer

Dear Jesus, wherever we find ourselves
may we be reminded that we are not alone.
You sit with us.

Help us not to become bitter to others who seek ill-will to us.
Instead, help us to respond in love by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Transform us to continually seek the higher purposes of the Kingdom of God. Amen.

Thursday 10th October

The Rev'd Angela Rigby, Minister, Christ Church URC Tonbridge and St Johns Hill URC Sevenoaks

Philippians 1: 19 - 26

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will result in my deliverance. It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame in any way, but that by my speaking with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me; and I do not know which I prefer. I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.

Reflection

Paul shares the message of Jesus Christ for the benefit of all who will hear it. He faces persecution because of it. He is imprisoned. Yet here, in today's reading, he tells the Philippians, "Whatever happens – I live or I die – I'm going to be okay. However, if I live, all the better for you and people like you, because I can keep telling folks about Jesus" (my paraphrase). After weighing up what to hope for, Paul chooses life. What might that mean today to choose life as Paul does?

Choose life. Choose risk. Choose possibly saying the right thing, to the wrong person. Choose prison. Choose not knowing if you will be freed in this life or the next. Choose love. Choose to love God enough to give God all of your heart, soul, mind and strength. Choose to love your neighbour as yourself – no - better than yourself. Choose to love

Wednesday 23rd October

Michael RJ Topple, Lay Pastoral Asst of Long Melford URC and Lay Preacher, Member of Chappel URC

Philippians 4: 8 - 9

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Reflection

Paul was writing at a time of great conflict and strife, both for writer and reader. Indeed, Paul begins the letter by talking of his impending sentencing in Rome, and his faith in the face of death.

The Church in Philippi was not carefree either. It was struggling with the tensions that every church group faces. Yet still, in spite of all of these difficulties, Paul tells his readers to strive after everything that is good.

In our world, the future may look bleak. As I write, the Brexit negotiations are seemingly at a standstill, the new Prime Minister is facing opposition from many quarters, and the conflict between the President of the United States and some Congresswomen has only just disappeared from the front pages of the newspapers.

Paul's message, however, still applies.

In his book 'Let me commend', Dr William Sangster explores how faith and evangelism may be just what the troubled world needs. Although seeking and sharing Jesus' love with those around us may not seem to

triumphalist, insensitive to members of our community who aren't feeling there is much to celebrate in their lives, or that we suggest the church is a cosy, self-satisfied club. But it is surely vital to communicate the joy of the Gospel, and not just the responsibilities of service and living a holy life. After all, as our fore-runners in the faith put it in the Westminster Shorter Catechism:

“What is the chief end of [humanity]?
[Humanity]’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever”

It may feel a tricky balance to strike, but let's make sure we make space for rejoicing in our lives and the lives of our churches. Rejoice with parents welcoming a longed-for child; rejoice with those falling in love; rejoice with those succeeding in work or study; rejoice with those making a new commitment to God; Rejoice in the Lord!

Prayer

Lord, we rejoice in the gift of life,
and the opportunities of each day;
in the way we live our lives today,
may we show we are rejoicing in you.

Open our eyes to the textures of life,
the rough and the smooth;
help us recognise our blessings,
even at the times we struggle.
And each in our own way, may we rejoice,
and know your peace in our hearts and in our minds. Amen.

each other especially when you disagree. Choose to share the good news to anyone who will listen. Choose Christ. Choose the narrow gate, to follow the Shepherd's voice, to be found when you stray. Choose sinners. Choose to eat with, to chat with, to laugh with, and to cry with those people the religious elite have warned you about. Choose to expect the dead to be raised to new life. Choose community. Choose inviting everyone. Choose the refugee and the migrant. Choose sharing. Choose that you might lose your shirt. Choose gaining your soul instead. Choose the Earth. Choose less plastics and petrol. Choose being a good caretaker of Earth for future generations' sakes. Choose to follow the life-changing Messiah. Choose God's community building project marked by "fruits of the Spirit" at work within it. Choose not to "rage against" whatever for the sake of raging. Choose an intentional life that builds God's community. Choose life. Choose Christ.

Prayer

God in the prison,
help us to choose the life-giving ways of Christ.
Help us who experience freedom
to seek freedom for those held captive unjustly.
Help us to use our freedom
to speak Christ's words of grace with boldness.
For the sake of Christ and all of His body, Amen

[Friday 11th October](#)

The Rev'd George Watt, minister of Reigate Park United Reformed Church

Philippians 1: 27 - 30

Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will

know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well— since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Refecation

Big brother is watching! Was Paul unnecessarily controlling as he told the church in Philippi how they should live and that he would see or hear about what they were up to? Of course not. He knew that this fledgling church would face challenging times and needed to be prepared for it. God's grace and forgiveness is freely given but their and our response is to live a holy life.

And central to this is that they are to stand firm in one Spirit. On a recent visit to Rome we visited the Church of St Ignatius of Loyola. It was a real gem in many ways. But in particular there was an amazing model built by an Italian cabinet maker. He started it when he was 70 and completed it when he was 98 shortly before he died. Around the model there were churches from the five continents. But as you raised your eyes there was a huge dome representing the whole Church of Jesus Christ. The creator was making the point that there are many expressions of Church but they are only part of the whole and that Christ's Church is so much bigger than our own little churches. It also recalls Jesus' prayer that his followers would be one.

It was important in Paul's time as it is today that the church doesn't divide and fragment. He sees this as central in the Gospel is going to be proclaimed. And he warns that they will meet opposition and describes it as a privilege if they suffer because of their faith. Paul should know

Tuesday 22nd October

Gordon Woods, Elder, St. Columba's URC, Oxford

Philippians 4: 1 - 7

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved. I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Reflection

The first time I saw Hamlet I was surprised how familiar the text was, even though I'd never read the play; reading Philippians can be a bit like that, as you suddenly find you're reading a text you've frequently sung. This passage inspired two entries in Rejoice and Sing - 286 (Rejoice in the Lord always) is probably more familiar, but 516 (We Praise You Lord For All That's True and Pure) is definitely worth a look. I am fond of the anthem attributed to John Redford - you can hear the Cambridge Singers' recording here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mQ1cyLvdBc4>

It is striking that in the closing section of a letter he might have expected to be his last, Paul's instruction is to rejoice in the Lord - rather than to regret his imprisonment, repent, or prepare for the end times, for example. What does that mean for us? Some of us may be a little hesitant to do too much rejoicing, lest our worship seem

Reflection

Who are our heroes? To whom do we look up and try and copy? We have so many role models nowadays... footballers, models, pop stars... we try and follow the fashions they wear (although usually the nearest we can get to their style is by wearing something we got from the market that copies their look), the lifestyle they live. We follow their every move and thought on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat. We want to be like them. We want to BE them. We do ourselves harm by not eating so that we might look like them. Some people even have cosmetic surgery in order to look more like their heroes.

Of course, none of them, or not many at least, are 'enemies of Christ'. But they distract us from trying to be more like the one we all profess to follow. We search and yearn for earthly things when we know that these might give short term pleasure and satisfaction at best.

But there ARE worthy role models in our world today. Greta Thunberg is a modern day prophet trying to warn us about how we are in real danger of ruining God's creation. J K Rowling and Bill Gates are giving away vast portions of their wealth to help make life better for people with fewer opportunities than they have. And there are others – in our churches and communities. And it is their example that we should be following. So why aren't we?

Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to nip down to the market...

Prayer

Loving God,
Help us not to be distracted by the glitz and glamour of our world, by those who seem to have it all but do nothing with it.
Help us to see that, in following your Son more closely, we can be examples of your love to the people we meet. Amen.

as he has been imprisoned for his faith. Together, Paul in Rome, and the believers in Philippi stand in solidarity as they witness to Jesus.

Dear God,
Help us to stand firm...
to stand firm with our fellow believers
to stand firm for what is right
to stand firm against opposition
to stand firm when we suffer
to stand firm in living and proclaiming the Gospel.
But we can't do it by ourselves.
We need your help and the encouragement of each other. Amen

[Saturday 12th October](#)

The Rev'd Helen M Mee is a member of Morningside United Church, Edinburgh

Philippians 2: 1-4

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

Reflection

Attitude/At(t)-I-Tude

And Jesus said
'Come on give me attitude girl.
That is what we need.
That is what it takes.

That is where we are at - now and always, everywhere, across time and place.'

Jesus said

'Strut your stuff – after all we created it for you to use.

Compete with each other

Compete with us

Get that 'tude out there.

That is where we are at – where you are called to be!

Jesus said

'there is an I in attitude.

I for identity.'

Jesus said

'I am the I in attitude.'

The I in attitude is Jesus shaped – both having and being!

Jesus said

'there is a you in attitude.

I call you, I exhort you to bring my shape to your attitude, to shape your actions boldly, lovingly, compassionately and to deliver them with my chutzpah.'

Jesus said

'This is the good news, there is a we in attitude.

We in all our diversity, made in Our Image,

we in our love for one another,

we in our impetus always to prioritise the needs of the other in creation.'

(Thus meeting our own God-given need.)

Jesus the Redeemer said

'There is a cross in attitude

I have taken this symbol of power and made it mine.

eyes have seen your salvation". Luke 2:30. We have the word of God revealed in both the old and new testaments. Like David we can praise God in song and while we know that we have often strayed like a lost sheep we can reply upon Jesus, the shepherd, to protect us and lead us gently back to where we can find peace and security with Him.

Prayer

Loving God,

We thank you that we have your word, both the word as the bible and the living word who is Jesus.

We thank you for all your promises to us and for the life that we enjoy in your presence.

We thank you for the love of Jesus and for your Holy Spirit our comforter.

We ask that we will always remember to turn to you when we need help or support Amen

[Monday 21st October](#)

Leo Roberts, Children and Youth Development Officer for the North Western Synod of the United Reformed Church

Philippians 3: 17 - 21

Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation so that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.

May my tongue sing aloud of your word;
Your commandments are righteous, O LORD.

May your hand be stretched out for my aid,
Since by choice your commands I've obeyed.
I desire your salvation to see,
And your law is delightful to me.

Let me live and I'll praise you in song;
May your laws give me help to go on.
Seek your servant who strayed like a sheep,
For your precepts I steadfastly keep.

Reflection

David is reaching the end of this, the longest, Psalm. He continues to refer to the law of God, he has called it different things, here he uses Word, in Hebrew imrah, and this means anything God has spoken, commanded, or promised.

We can echo these feelings of David, we need insight and it is good to know that God has promised this to us. We can rejoice that our lives have been saved, not by our pleading but by the gift of Jesus who God sent into this world.

We can praise God for all that we have learned from Him. We know that God stretched out His hand as we know how He gave us His Son to be sacrificed for us. David wrote that his lips were overflowing with praise, how much more should we be praising secure in the knowledge that we have the Holy Spirit with us at all times. We can praise because we do not need to earn our salvation, Jesus earned it for us.

We do not need to struggle on alone as God does stretch out His arm to aid us. Our salvation has been fully revealed to us. Luke records the words of Simeon who cradled the infant Jesus in his arms and said "my

Made it a symbol of belonging.'

Jesus said
'Come on give me attitude, loud, proud, I, you, they, we.'

Jesus said
'This is my commandment.....'

"Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world." St Teresa of Avila

Prayer

Loving God give us your attitude,
shape us and our actions using a Christlike mould.
Enable us to contribute to Your great meld of heaven.
Today and always. Amen

[Sunday 13th October](#)

Ann Barton, member and a lay leader at Whittlesford URC in the Eastern Synod

Psalm 118: 1-14

1 O thank the LORD, for he is good;
His steadfast love endures always.
2 Now let the house of Israel say,
"His love will last through endless days."

3 And let the house of Aaron say,
"His love for ever will endure."

4 Let those who fear the LORD declare,
“His love will stand for ever sure.”

5 I cried in anguish to the LORD;
He answered me and set me free.

6 The LORD is with me; I'll not fear.
What harm can people do to me?

7 The LORD is with me constantly;
He is the one who gives me aid.
I'll look in triumph on my foes;
I will not need to be afraid.

8 It's better far to trust the LORD
Than look for help to man's defence.

9 It's better far to trust the LORD
Than in a prince have confidence.

10 The nations all surrounded me;
In God's great name I made them fall.

11 They hemmed me in on every side;
In God's great name I slew them all.

12 They chased me like a swarm of bees;
But like a heap of thorns aflame
They very quickly met their end.
I slew them in the LORD's great name.

13 I was pushed back and nearly fell;
The LORD himself gave help to me.

14 He is my song and source of strength;
The LORD gave me the victory.

course in a different direction! The same can so easily be true in our lives and Walk.

Finally, my evening in the canoe reminded me that the journey can be fun, too!

Prayer

Risen Christ,
You met Your Disciples on the shore,
and they began their Journeys.
You calmed the stormy sea,
and they knelt in awe of Your power.
You walked throughout Judea,
and they learnt how to walk Your Way.
You gave Yourself up and yet rose in glory,
and You were theirs all until their last days.
Source, Guide, and Goal of all that is:
be for us, as You were for them. Amen.

[Sunday 20th October](#)

John Collings. Lay Preacher, member of Rutherglen URC

Psalm 119: 169-176

Let my cry come before you, O LORD;
Give me insight as pledged in your word.
May my pleading gain access to you;
Save my life, as you promised to do.

May my lips overflow with your praise,
For you teach me your statutes always.

heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. Only let us hold fast to what we have attained.

Reflection

The theme of today's text follows on from yesterday's. The 'goal' mentioned by Paul is knowing the the Risen Christ, a life-long relationship which available for everyone. For Paul, he is focused and unswerving – even single-minded – towards his goal.

Wherever there is a goal, there is also a journey towards the goal.

Recently, a friend invited me to join him at his weekly paddle-sport club at a local reservoir, an experience which inspired this reflection.

As I knelt in the canoe, paddle in hand, the instructor recommended that I have a goal in mind, like a point on the opposite bank of the reservoir. It was a lovely summer's evening with little wind, and as long as I kept my strokes to the left and right even, I made good progress towards my goal. Occasionally, I had a stronger or weaker stroke to one side which threw me off course. Also, there were slight gusts of wind which affected my course. If I allowed my thoughts to wander, or take my eye of my goal, I was more likely to go off-course.

As individuals, and as church communities, we are "Walking the Way" towards our goal. We have stronger and weaker days which affect our faith journey, like my paddling strokes. There are times when we are affected by external events, like the wind against my canoe; and sometimes, we are temporarily distracted and lose sight of our goal.

I also learnt on the reservoir that regaining control towards my goal needed care – it was easy to overcompensate and end up going off-

Reflection

The verses are clearly a call to celebration; the speaker calls on the congregation to join him in thanking God and goes on to relate the occasions that leads him to worship God. Having been surrounded by enemies, God helped him in destroying them. The Psalm is a procession song to the sanctuary, where the individual leads in expressing gratitude on behalf of himself, and then the whole congregation.

The Psalmist goes on to describe the anguish that he had been facing; caught up in a war, his nation overrun, and his land invaded. All seemed hopeless, but, somehow, God delivered and gave him victory. Problems swarmed him like bees, but God saved him. He was pushed back, but the Lord helped him. God does the same for us too, when we are anguished, attacked, pushed back, swarmed, invaded, and hopeless.

Like the Psalmist, when I look back over the (many) years of my life, like you, I can clearly see God's intervention at times of great need. I remember when I was desperately unhappy at work and could not see a way forward. A, supposedly, coincidental meeting with a URC minister, who told me that there was a vacancy at the Eastern Synod office, changed my life. If she is reading this, she will recognise herself! Know that I am truly thankful.

This Psalm also forms part of the 'Hallel', which is a Jewish prayer - a verbatim recitation from Psalms 113–118 recited by observant Jews on Jewish holidays as an act of praise and thanksgiving. It is still sung traditionally during Passover in celebration of the Exodus. We sometimes forget that Jesus was a practicing Jew who would have known the Psalms very well. He may well have recited the complete Hallel with his disciples, at his last Passover celebration. Think of that!

Prayer:

Heavenly Father,
we thank you for the things that link us:
for shared worship,
fellowship in prayer,
opportunities to read and study the Bible together,
the forging of bonds and friendship,
ways to express together a caring, loving spirit in our congregation, our
home and community
that all can see who we owe our allegiance to and whom we serve.
Accept our love and thanks, in the Saviour's name. Amen

[Monday 14th October](#)

The Rev'd Dr David Whiting, Minister, Sunderland and Boldon URC
Partnership

Philippians 2: 5 - 11

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him

You couldn't ever call Paul bland. I don't think Jesus comes across as bland either, especially when he confronts corruption and exploitation. And the God of the Old Testament certainly doesn't hold back when he speaks his mind - and his judgment - against human wickedness.

There's plenty for modern-day Christians to speak out about. But are we - unlike Paul - afraid of what we might lose? What would the church look like if we were to take a leaf out of Paul's book and call all our qualifications and advantages and status, all our traditions and privileges 'rubbish' for Christ?

Prayer

Open our eyes, Lord Jesus,
to what is real and true and to what is rubbish
in your eternal scheme of things.
Open our hands to let go of the rubbish.
Open our hearts to receive the real and true,
and then light-hearted, unburdened by the rubbish,
send us out to share your love,
happy to be your servants in your world. Amen.

[Saturday 19th October](#)

Walt Johnson, Elder, Wilbraham St Ninian's URC, Chorlton, Manchester

Philippians 3: 12-16

Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal for the prize of the

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the Church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Reflection

He's not a boring sort, old Paul. This short passage leaps from passionate denunciation of those who were trying to lead Christian folk back into the shackles of the Law - complete with superbly Pauline sarcasm as to his own blamelessness! - into the even more passionate heights of his devotion to Christ. This is Paul's testimony, the meaning of his life and his one aim and focus, we may remind ourselves, as he faces death from a prison in Rome.

We have it so easy in comparison. Our worst experiences are most likely being mocked or snubbed or someone daring to say they disagree with us. And I wonder are we the poorer - and the more boring - for it? In our mild Western world with its politically correct tolerance of everyone and everything, are we all settling down to a beige blandness?

and gave him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Reflection

For many years the words of our passage today have known as the Christ Hymn. Whether it was written before Paul and then used by Paul, or whether it was written by Paul himself is open to debate. The words are much loved and have certainly inspired hymn writers - everything from 'Servant King' to 'At the name of Jesus' have this passage in mind.

As we reflect on the passage maybe the story of Adam in Genesis comes to mind. Adam sought to be equal with God but was humbled, Christ Jesus does not seek that equality for gain, rather he is born as one of us..

Why does Paul want to share these words with his readers in Philippi? Paul writes from a prison cell, his ministry has been inspired by the self sacrifice of Christ. So he tells them about Christ who takes the way of humility and lowliness all the way to the cross.

In the second part of the hymn, we get a change in tone and we read perhaps one of the highest statements about Jesus that we find in the whole of Scripture. Paul has a hope that Christ will be exalted to the place that is rightly his. Jesus' name will be above every name and will invite devotion and worship.

Paul wants his readers to be united and to have the same mind as was in Christ. We are not to seek authority or, as Paul writes earlier in the letter, look to our own interests, but to show a right concern for each other.

Prayer

Gracious God,
may we learn from Jesus,
may we not be selfishly ambitious,
but may we take the path of humility,
the way of service.
In the name of Jesus Christ,
and to God's glory. Amen.

[Tuesday 15th October](#)

The Rev'd Ruth Watson, Minister, Patricroft and Worsley Road URCs in Salford

Philippians 2: 12 - 13

Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, 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.

Reflection

As a parent of teenage children I am constantly aware of my hope that all I have taught them in terms of manners and behaviour will stay with them throughout their life. The litmus test will be once they (eventually) leave home and begin their own lives without us around to

This little gem of mutual human care opens a window on Paul's nature for us; on the Gospel he, and we, proclaim. The care we bear for each other is intrinsic to the gospel. In the Christian drama in which we play our parts, people matter more than things. May we never have recourse to doctrine or dogma to deny this. May our hearts and heads be well married in living out our faith.

Prayer

Gracious God
when we forget that
your Son's work is in, with and through people,
recall us to a proper understanding of your nature in us.
May our care for
neighbour,
friend,
family,
fellow Christians
reflect our growth in Christ-likeness. Amen

[Friday 18th October](#)

Dorothy Curtis, lay preacher and member, Thurso United Reformed Church

Philippians 3: 1 - 11

Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is not troublesome to me, and for you it is a safeguard. Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh! For it is we who are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh— even though I, too, have reason for confidence in the flesh.

because you heard that he was ill. He was indeed so ill that he nearly died. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, so that I would not have one sorrow after another. I am the more eager to send him, therefore, in order that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. Welcome him then in the Lord with all joy, and honour such people, because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for those services that you could not give me.

Reflection

Paul's letter to the church at Phillippi is affectionate in tone, and his warm feelings seem to have been reciprocated. While under house arrest, awaiting trial in Rome, we learn that Paul has Timothy with him, a singularly trusted companion and fellow traveller. Timothy seems to have met Paul's exacting standards, so much so that Paul thinks of him as his son in the faith, entrusted, beyond others, with the care of churches Paul is unable to visit.

This passage also reveals that the church at Philippi has sent one of their valued members, Epaphroditus, to care for Paul during his detention. Travelling some 800 miles to be with Paul, he brings with him gifts to ease Paul's discomfort, including his very self to minister to him. Paul is deeply appreciative, both for the church's care of him, and Epaphroditus' presence.

He now has two fellow Christians devoted to his welfare. Both, for him, demonstrate the essence of the Gospel's message in word and deed. However, Epaphroditus has paid a heavy penalty in his journeying, barely recovering from illness, and is deeply worried about the effect such news might have on his home church. Commending him for his loyalty and help, Paul sends Epaphroditus home, with warm words of encouragement, in case any might think he has failed in his mission of mercy.

check up on them. Once they have gone, it is up to them to follow the appropriate rules, while making their way in the world.

We are living out our faith in the physical absence of Christ, but in the presence of an all-seeing God. As with a child under the shadow of parental influence, yet without their physical presence, we can all too easily be tempted to "do our own thing". Temptations are all around us, calling to us, telling us, "it's ok", or "no-one will know" or "nobody's looking". Sometimes we are overwhelmed and give in, other times, when we are stronger, we resist.

But in either scenario, we are not to be afraid. God is not out to punish us for sport but there to strengthen us in the path of doing the right thing. We will know when we step out of line – it is up to us what we do about it.

So, let us allow God to be at work in us, in all we do, that we might work for, and serve Him, in our lives.

Prayer

Lord God, may we so live that you are at work in us. Strengthen us to face the temptations of the world and guide us on how to resist them. May we remember your teachings and walk in your footsteps every day of our lives. Amen.

[Wednesday 16th October](#)

The Rev'd Ruth Dillon, Minister of Fleet URC and Beacon Hill Hindhead URC

Philippians 2: 14 - 18

Do all things without murmuring and arguing, so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst

of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world. It is by your holding fast to the word of life that I can boast on the day of Christ that I did not run in vain or labour in vain. But even if I am being poured out as a libation over the sacrifice and the offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you — and in the same way you also must be glad and rejoice with me.

Reflection

What does anger feel like?

Descriptions differ from internal chaos to frustration, and a feeling as though we have an internal volcano waiting to erupt. Sometimes we may feel we just ‘have to have our say’, regardless of taking anybody else’s feelings into account. ‘Getting things off our chest’, we say to ourselves, is a healthy position to be in and, somehow, we can feel better and lighter. We even justify to ourselves that Jesus got angry, (with the money changers), so if Jesus got angry, it’s ok for me to get angry.

There is a difference though; Jesus’ anger was fuelled for passion for God’s people, the injustice, suffering, and oppression; even Jesus presence caused a stir in all the circles of society.

2,000 years later, Jesus still gently persuades, cares for, and compassionately guides people into action. In turn they shine like stars within their community and culture as they acquire a ‘righteous anger’, and seek change for the good.

When we are serving, being an advocate for God’s people, we do shine like stars, internally and externally. We may not be noticed, or even feel it within ourselves, but we are pouring out our faith for others, by our encouragement and supportive action to projects close to our hearts; we participate with God to enable the flourishing and growth of God’s people.

Is your light shining brightly or is it clouded by complaints and arguing? Be a clear and radiant light shining out for God, lets us turn or frustrated anger to righteous anger.

Prayer

For the times, we speak in haste and anger, forgive us.
For the times we use our power to control others, forgive us.

For the times we encourage individuals on their journey, bless us.
For the times we stand up for what is right and just, bless us.

For the times we shine like stars within your radiant light,
Lord make us your holy disciples,
that overflow with the gifts of your ever-dancing Spirit. Shalom.

Thursday 17th October

The Rev’d John A Young retired minister of the Synod of Scotland and member of Giffnock URC

Philippians 2: 19 - 30

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I may be cheered by news of you. I have no one like him who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. All of them are seeking their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But Timothy’s worth you know, how like a son with a father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. I hope therefore to send him as soon as I see how things go with me; and I trust in the Lord that I will also come soon.

Still, I think it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus—my brother and co-worker and fellow-soldier, your messenger and minister to my need; for he has been longing for all of you, and has been distressed