

Philippians 2:1-13 (CEB)

Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort in love, any sharing in the Spirit, any sympathy, ² complete my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love, being united, and agreeing with each other. ³ Don't do anything for selfish purposes, but with humility think of others as better than yourselves. ⁴ Instead of each person watching out for their own good, watch out for what is better for others. ⁵ Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus:

⁶ Though he was in the form of God,
he did not consider being equal with God something to exploit.

⁷ But he emptied himself
by taking the form of a slave
and by becoming like human beings.

When he found himself in the form of a human,

⁸ he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death,
even death on a cross.

⁹ Therefore, God highly honored him
and gave him a name above all names,

¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus everyone
in heaven, on earth, and under the earth might bow

¹¹ and every tongue confess that
Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

¹² Therefore, my loved ones, just as you always obey me, not just when I am present but now even more while I am away, carry out your own salvation with fear and trembling. ¹³ God is the one who enables you both to want and to actually live out his good purposes.

"Live in Faith"

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Last week we had the joy of confirming four youth into a life of discipleship and membership in the church. Scott shared the beautiful passage from Philippians chapter 1: "He who began a good work in you will be faithful to

complete it.” We may have moved beyond Confirmation Sunday and be looking ahead to the other landmark events on the Calendar, like Mother’s Day today, and Youth Led Worship next week, and Graduation on the horizon. But the lectionary has not moved us so far ahead. We are still in Philippians – Chapter 2 this week – and before we rush ahead, Paul has more instructions for us.

But before we move on, one more word about last week. Philippians 1:6 is among my favorite scripture passages. It took root in my heart and mind when I attended MAD camp – Music, Art and Drama camp – in junior high. In the span of a week we learned and performed a musical about Timothy, Paul’s student. And the song we sang last week based on that passage – *he who began a good work in you* – was part of that musical. I have never forgotten it.

This week’s passage is just as memorable. This first portion of Philippians, chapter 2, was one of the texts for our wedding in 1998, and our ordination 8 years later in the same little country church: “Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”

In nearly a half-century of life growing up in the church, there are so many of these promises and words of encouragement that flow easily from my mind and my lips. I imagine that we share a fondness for some of those familiar words. In fact, I imagine that if I were to start reciting them, or singing them, you would be able to join me:

- “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in him will not perish, but will have eternal life (John 3:16).
- “The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want; ² he makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters;^[a] ³ he restores my soul.^[b] He leads me in paths of righteousness^[c] for his name’s sake. ⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,^[d] I fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

⁵ Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies; thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows. ⁶ Surely^[e] goodness and mercy^[f] shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for ever (Psalm 23)."

- "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found. Was blind, but now I see."

If you were able to say or sing those words with me, its not because you heard them once and your perfect memory preserved them. You were able to say or sing them with me because in your life you have rehearsed them, over and over again. Knowledge of those words – and so many others - comes from of lifetime of Sundays and daily devotions. The reality for many of us is that we have heard them so many times, spoken them so many times, that they have become part of us.

And that is really important.

We live in a world where an entire library's worth of reference materials are available – literally - at our fingertips. We don't have to memorize things any more because we can just look them up. And we can look them up with incomplete information.

OK Google – find "money is the root of all evil."

I just pulled up links directing me to 1 Timothy 6:10 – "the love of money is the root of all evil" - in two different online Bibles and multiple articles about how this is one of the most misquoted and misunderstood texts from the Bible.

With the touch of a button I have access to a dictionary, a thesaurus, maps, and more encyclopedic knowledge than could fit in 10 sets worth of the *World Book Encyclopedias* that lived on my childhood bookshelf. I can carry around 59 English versions of the Bible around in my pocket. Did you even know there were 59 English versions of the Bible? Not to mention multiple hymnals, our Book of Confessions, Book of Order, and Book of Common Worship.

So why bother memorizing anything? Is it any wonder today's Sunday School students give you side-eye when you try to get them to memorize verses, or

the books of the Bible? Why take the time to rehearse these words of faith and commit them to memory?

Here's why. Like Paul, we may one day find ourselves imprisoned, isolated, or alone. With no internet and a dead battery. In all seriousness, Paul was in trouble. He was in prison, as he was on so many occasions, for proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ and inviting people to become followers of The Way – as it was called in its early days. The Way of Jesus Christ was counter-cultural, revolutionary, and unsanctioned. And Paul was awaiting trial to learn whether he would live or be executed. In those days of uncertainty, he wrote letters to encourage the early church. And, I suspect, to encourage himself.

Now, I want you to consider this for a moment. Following Jesus was new. These new converts to the faith did not have the benefit of a lifetime of learning songs in Sunday School, or seeing the stories acted out at VBS. They didn't live in a culture where Christmas and Easter were part of the vernacular. Everything they were learning was new. They didn't have this fully expressed, easily accessible canon of scripture. Most of what they were learning they were hearing and committing to memory. Letters were shared and passed between churches. The stories were painted on walls and ceilings as visual prompts for the stories. And what they believed was articulated in song and poem to aid in memory.

That is what we find in today's passage: this passage (the middle portion of it) is called the "Christ Hymn." The consensus of biblical scholars is that Paul is quoting an early confession or hymn of the church – its much more poetic in Greek. But the understanding is that this Christ Hymn would have been familiar to the church in Philippi (to whom he was writing). This Christ Hymn is understood to be a means by which new converts were taught about Jesus – and they committed it to memory and rehearsed it as they grew in their understanding of Jesus and what it meant to be his follower. In much the same way, our hymns and praise songs preserve and teach our theology in a memorable way.

And when Paul found himself in prison, possibly facing death, it was to those familiar words that he turned for comfort. Paul was great theologian he could converse with the common person as effortlessly as he argued against the stoic philosophers. He could, and did, articulate a deep, and sometimes challenging understanding of what it meant to follow Christ – to be the church

- to be God's people. But he was also a human being. And committing to a life of "adopting the same mind that is in Christ Jesus...who in the form of a human, [he] humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death..." means something completely different when you are holding a debate in the marketplace than it does when you are in prison awaiting your death.

Memorizing those words was a scholarly exercise. Living them was an act of faith. And it was in that faith that Paul, and so many after him, found comfort in the midst of hardship. Just as Paul was one of the most influential theologians of his day, Karl Barth was one of the most influential theologians of his day. Karl Barth was born in 1886 and was in his prime in the days leading up to, and during World War II. He was one of the founding members of the confessing church movement that stood in opposition to Hitler and the Nazis. It was his pen that wrote most of the words The Declaration of Barmen, one of the confessions of faith contained in our Book of Confessions. He wrote, lectured, and preached volumes. But when, in 1962, near the end of his life, he was asked how he would summarize the essence of the millions of words he had published, he replied, "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

When we asked our confirmation students to memorize the first verse of Psalm 136 - "[God's] steadfast love endures forever" - it wasn't to torture them, or so that they would be able to pass a confirmation test. It was so that when they failed a test, or got dumped, or lost a job, they would remember, they would know in their being, that they are loved, and that they aren't alone. It was so that someday, fearful or infirm, the promises would float across their consciousness, reminding them of Christ's promises to them. And those promises never fail us. We just don't always remember that those promises are for us. So, we read them, and we learn them.

If you aren't already doing that, let's begin today. Read the words until they are part of you. Rehearse what you know about Christ until you know him like a close confidant and friend. Don't wait until crisis hits to seek assurance. Know the assurance so you are not derailed by crisis. I spent this weekend with my mom and I was reminded why this is so important. Many of you know that my mother has macular degeneration and her vision is declining at an alarming rate. Even with her new high-tech magnification machine, reading is a challenge. But she is still the church organist. After 62 years of playing hymns every Sunday, she knows them. They are part of her. She doesn't need

to see them to play them – you just have to remind her how many verses you are singing. Even with much taken from her, she can still do this thing she loves.

So, friends, we will continue to wrestle with the theology, and study to understand more each day. And we will continue to discern what that means for how we live our lives of faith. We will continue to sing the hymns, and read the scriptures, and affirm our faith with the words of familiar creeds. We will pray together the Lord's prayer. Until they part of us. So that we never forget, never lose sight of the truth that Jesus loves us.

Alleluia! Amen.