

2026-09-27 ... 10am Service Sermon ... Revd Bev Jameson
Philippians 2.1-13

PRAYER

Father may these spoken words be faithful to the written word and lead us into the living word, Jesus Christ our Lord - Amen

SERMON

My friends Barbara Mike and I met when we were all at school fifty years ago. Barbara and Mike subsequently married each other and we have been friends, well more like family, ever since. We decided to go on holiday to Malta to celebrate our fiftieth anniversary. BUT we are very different people with very different attitudes and interests. Mike loves his neolithic temples but by the time we visited the fifth ruined temple of disjointed rocks scattered over ground one standing stone pretty much looked like another. I'd love to say we always got on well but sadly there were disagreements tensions and tetchiness At one point I thought a fifty year friendship may bite the dust but I guess we love one another enough to put up with each other's foibles and differences and as a family we sort of came through it, still caring and loving one another - just.

We are all different from one another and whatever group family, friendship, social, church we will not always get along unless we make an effort to. The early church was no exception. One of the reasons Paul writes to the church in Phillipi is because he has heard of disagreements tensions and tetchiness within the church. We don't really know what caused these tensions but I would guess it's the sort of jealousies and rivalries that can come out in any group of people, especially if those people are facing abuse or confrontation from outside, as the church in Phillipi was.

Phillipi in Northern Greece was a roman colony on the great north west north east highway. The town was occupied by Roman settlers who were fiercely loyal to Rome but Phillipi would have had a range of people from different backgrounds and social standing all rubbing shoulders together. Phillipi was the first church founded by Paul in Europe during his second missionary tour. He writes to them in chains as he is in house arrest awaiting trial in before the emperor on Rome.

In our reading this morning Paul encourages the church to live and work together in unity in our common life in Christ. In other words if when people are in union with Christ, they should experience a sense of overwhelming obligation in view of the love shown to them by God and the experience of participating in the life with God. As Paul delights in witing convoluted instructions lecturing the early church, I'll try and summarise in four points

1. To encourage a common way of thinking by following the values and way of life Christ preached – to love one another, to love our neighbour as ourselves
2. A common set of emotions perhaps rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep

3. A common love for one another, even if we do not particularly like one another
4. A common set of rules for the group

Paul is not saying we should not have differing opinions or viewpoints he is simply saying when it comes to the early church in Phillipi people should be respectful, listen to one another, think of what is best for the church and not push forward their own ambitions and egos. It is perfectly possible and reasonable for people to think independently and creatively in harmony with one another, It is equally possible for them to have genuine differences of opinion as to the way forward but agree a united way forward in the end – even if this means our own personal viewpoint may have to be conceded because we can see a different but acceptable way forward.

Easier said than done my friends. In 21 Century where politics has become combative, where the only correct view is your view, where the only truth is your truth we have fallen foul of this hostile skirmishing and it is too tempting to argue our corner, to push forward what we think is the correct and only way forward, shout down our opponents and indulge in disagreements tensions and tetchiness when we don't get our way. It is a universal culture followed by various people in positions of power across the world. Any compromise may be seen as weakness. We do not debate anymore we shout down our opponents With such examples is it not surprising that this culture filters down to ordinary men women and children who in day to day life fight for what they want without a thought for others needs or view points

But as Christians we are counter cultural. We do not follow the values and attitudes of the world. We acknowledge Jesus as lord and it is his example, his values we strive to follow. The commandment Jesus gave us in Mark 12:30-31 is quite straightforward

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

That doesn't mean we will always agree, or never fall out, or not have disagreements tensions and tetchiness, because we are only flawed human beings and we will have disagreements tensions and tetchiness. Sometimes it is not easy But it means we have a choice in how we behave. We have a choice in what we do. We may choose to disagree with respect and love for one another, wrapped in the grace of God, the love of Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. And as Paul said to the Philippians so it is for us

For it is God who is at work in you enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure

This day and every day

AMEN