

Contend as one man for the sake of the Gospel
Philippians 1:21-30

Good morning to each one of you and warm welcome to worship on this, the Lord's day. What a privilege it is to once again be gathered in the presence of the Lord and to come together in a unified act of worship. The Psalmist reminds us this morning of the greatness of the Lord when he says in Psalm 121:

“ 1 I lift up my eyes to the mountains - where does my help come from? 2 My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. 3 He will not let your foot slip - he who watches over you will not slumber; 4 indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. 5 The Lord watches over you - the Lord is your shade at your right hand; 6 the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. 7 The Lord will keep you from all harm - he will watch over your life;

8 the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.” And what an assurance that is for each one of us this morning, knowing that the One who created all things is the One who watches over us now and forevermore.

Let us pray:

Our reading this morning is taken from Philippians 1:21-30.

21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; 24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.

One of the hardest things to understand about the Christian life is the fact that this life, for the Christian believer, is not meant to be a life of glamour, a life of praise nor is it a life of honour. We look around us and witness so many injustices, atrocities inflicted upon our fellow men and women, so many moments where we see people around us constantly and consistently being pushed down, pushed to one side, by those who seek to elevate and further themselves... For the modern world order, it would seem as though this was the chief end of mankind, to get as far in life and to gain as much power or authority regardless of who you hurt along way, because is this not what we have been taught to do?

What do you think our faith would have looked like if this were the attitude of Christ? If this were the attitude of Paul, Peter, John or any of the other apostles or great leaders of the faith? Imagine for a second what message would be taught this morning, what message would be taught to your children or your grandchildren... *“To live is only as good in as far as I can get?” “If I am to go on living in the body then I will be sure to get what I want when I want it?” “I will continue with all of you as long as you submit to my authority and power?”* This is far from the message that is preached by Christ and far from the truth of how we ought to be living, and this is what Paul is testifying to...

From verse 21 to verse 26, Paul is making one thing very clear – his life is not his own. The Christian life, a life grounded in the living Christ, is a life grounded in service. **To live is Christ** quite simply the basis for Paul's conduct, the basis for his actions and the basis for his teachings, even the basis for his continuous joy while

facing hardship, things that you and I could possibly never even dream of facing. And yet through it all, the imprisonments, the floggings, the beatings, the ship-wrecks, the hunger, rejection and persecution, Paul's life is Christ centred. It is what governs his entire existence here on earth... But he takes it further than simply the here and the now, because for Paul, **to die is gain** – not gaining praise and honour for what he's achieved during his life but he has the assurance that in death, his gain is being with Christ.

Yet Paul, I suggest within his own being, is still conflicted by what would be better for him. His desire, as I suspect each one of us might desire as well, is to be fully and completely with Christ, yet he also understands that there is still a task which he has been called to complete and so understands that His service to Christ as well as his service to the Philippian church must continue for the sake of the gospel – it is so important that he remain so that their faith in Christ may abound.

Paul, having now laid the foundation for the example to be followed, offers this exhortation:

27 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel 28 without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. 29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, 30 since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

This exhortation once again highlights the believers need to live a life of service, a life that is not self-centred or self-exalting, but a life worthy of the Gospel of Christ. What does this mean though? Well quite simply, it is a call to live out our lives according to the standards set out for us within the gospel, it is a call for us to strive towards the goals given and that we would remain faithful in and through all circumstances. But notice that this exhortation is not aimed at one specific person, it is not an exhortation to be taken on by one individual within the faith community.

In a time where individualism seems to be the ruling authority for much of the world, how are we to respond? Firstly, we are to stand firm in the one Spirit: That is to say, we are to have the same disposition, the same character, the same nature with a common purpose, led and directed by the Spirit of God. Secondly, we are to contend as one man (that is to say, as one person) for the faith of the gospel. **1 Corinthians 12:27 says, “You are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”** Each one of us has a role to play, a purpose and a calling in God's plan.

Last week we focused on Romans 14, understanding that we are to be unified in the Spirit and to that end, the same call runs throughout scripture. Having been united with Christ in His death we will also be united with Him in His resurrection. And by His death and His resurrection, the Spirit of God has been poured out upon us that we, by His leading, will be able to stand firm in the faith together. When opposition comes, when the hardships of life creep in and when we are challenged as the people of God, for the sake of the gospel, we are to stand firm together.

Opening Song: Christ our hope in Life and Death - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oibli1rz7mw>

Closing Song: It is well with my soul - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZYrL9ea1XUg>

Lincon Hardouin
Trinity, Lynnwood
20th September 2020