

Philippians 2:1-13

Out of all the early churches that were recognised as having Paul's involvement, I think that it's obvious from the tone of his letters, that the Church in Philippi was one of Paul's favourites. However, like many of the early church communities it seems that this one has sort of lost its way. It has fallen foul to division.

Throughout the history of the Christian Church there have been divisions and fall outs about different understandings of theology and doctrine. The Church Universal has been divided and sectioned into so many bits now that it is hard to imagine them all belonging to the one faith in those early days. Indeed our own Church of England has found itself tied in so many knots about the ordination of women, and women Bishops, and now about the role and position of LGBT people and marriage- it seems the Church will always be wrestling with itself, but here in our reading we hear that some of the community want one thing, others another, and still more something different again. Paul knew that they would never reach their potential of being the Body of Christ on the earth, if they couldn't unite and become of one mind.

Paul suggests that they look together at what they have as strengths, he knew they were good people with good intentions, speaking openly about Jesus, some sharing a welcoming fellowship, and others demonstrating compassion.

Start with what you have, there are always good and bad in all people, and the Church is not exempt. Look around and you will find some congregations are more loving than others, some more mission focused and others more committed to social action.

Paul urges them to put aside a sense of competition and self interest, instead to be of one mind and committed to look for a power greater than themselves. Reminding them how Jesus emptied himself of all things and taking on the form of a servant.

In His life Jesus was not a celebrity, his birth was announced to only a few, his ministry only lasted 3 years at best, less time than the average prime minister or president. He died alongside 2 known common criminals on waste land outside the City. To the eyes of the world he was a nobody, and yet to those who looked to him he was the only begotten son of the most high God. So that at the name of Jesus every knee would bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ was Lord.

In His life he demonstrated the characteristics that Paul encourages the Philippians Church to embrace. A man who came not to be served, but to save, giving his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45)

A man prepared to don a towel and wash the feet of his disciples as an example to others (John 13:14-15)

When they got into an argument about who was the greatest, reminded his followers they were to be the least to be the greatest (Matthew 23:11)

And in his final prayer, declaring "not my will, but thine" (Luke 22:42)

Paul's final reminder to his friends in Philippi is for them to stand on their own feet, and work out

their salvation in fear and trembling. An important reminder that God will lead the way and we are never starting out from scratch. Always building upon what we know. Important reminder as we emerge from Lockdown, our rediscovery of what God wants from us is not about starting g from scratch.

Thanks be to God
Amen.