

“Participating in Christ’s Passion”

Philippians 3:4b-21

As we continue our four week journey reading through Paul’s letter to the Philippians, we get to see what this “epistle of joy” is really all about. Paul very much wants his readers to be filled with encouragement and true joy – not the happy euphoria that we often equate with “joy.” Or even the Pollyanna happiness that, whatever hardships may come my way, I am just going to be happy and filled with optimism every single day. That was not Paul’s reality. That is no one’s reality. But rather, Paul is filled with relief, contentment in Christ – the lifting of burdens that we have no strength to lift on our own.

Today is a day to celebrate true joy, in Christ, and as I said last week, we are going to again talk about participation, fellowship, koinonia. Therefore, it is appropriate that we are taking time today to also celebrate the work of the LWML. There is joy, there is fellowship, there is participation in the ongoing actions of these faithful women.

So often, whenever a person is becoming involved in a group or fellowship – whenever you are going to “share with someone in something,” the question that is almost always in the back of our sinful minds is, “What do I get out of it?” When first

entering into the situation, this tends to be an unanswerable question. Ask a young couple what it will be like to be a father or a mother. They can't tell you. They think they know, but they don't know. Ask a person who is ridden with guilt what it is going to feel like when you are completely forgiven. They can't tell you, because they have not yet experienced it, and they don't expect it.

Until you have koinonia (fellowship, participation in something) you will never know what it means to participate. This is true of the work of the LWML. A couple weeks ago, when we heard the parable of the workers in the vineyard, I said, "if you are a worker in the vineyard; whether you have been called late or were called early, it is not about you or what extra you will get out of it. We all get the same "pay" at the end of the day. Your calling is to work. But, there is great joy (earthly happiness) in the "extra" we do get. There is extra (earthly joy) but it's not what you think. It is the joy of serving; the joy of sacrificing your time for the benefit of someone who can't give back to you; the joy of sacrificial giving. That is the extra. And if you don't know what that feels like, I can't explain it to you. It is something in which you simply need to participate.

Paul speaks to the Philippians about participating (having koinonia). As we saw last week, this is the Holy Communion word from 1st Corinthians. Paul goes to great lengths to point out that his righteousness is a righteousness that is not his own. My

works “I count as rubbish.” The English does not do this verse justice because Paul is making a “manure” reference in a PG-13 kind of way. I count everything as “rubbish.”

Our life in Christ is not about participating in good, righteous deeds or our catalog of accomplishments. Paul talks about his utter failure when he was living as a Pharisee of Pharisees. When we place any of our salvation on how "good" we are in regard to our works – how much strength we have, we end up in guilt and despair. I know how much of a sinner I am.

If I try and lie to myself and convince myself that my works are better than your works; that God is more pleased with the work of my hands; or as is more often the case – if I convince myself that my sins are no big deal because God is loving and gracious. After all, how could a loving God be angry at my sin? “It’s not that big of a deal compared to what other people do.”

The point is, He is a loving God who is angry at sin. Sin has separated His children, the children of Adam, has separated you from Him. You and I were born without koinonia, without fellowship or participation with Him. We didn’t even have knowledge of Him. He had to fix this and give us righteousness that we may know Him and the power of the resurrection. Because that is what it is all about – the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.

If you want to understand the love of God, look no further than what He did to bring about the reality of the resurrection of

the dead. He sent His own Son to “become sin for us” so that God’s righteous anger at your sin would be directed at Jesus. You and I deserve death and hell. Jesus endured His Passion on the cross so that we can participate in His Passion and resurrection.

Paul says our faith in Christ, our righteousness from God is all for one purpose, “that I may know him and the power of his resurrection” because that is what it is all about – that is our source of joy, happiness, encouragement, contentment. But the next phrase doesn’t cut it in the English: “and may share His sufferings.” “Share” is that *koinonia* word – have fellowship in, participate in, have Holy Communion with – His “sufferings?” – His Passion. That’s what it says. We have Holy Communion with His Passion – participation in the body and blood of Christ given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.

It is just like what Paul says in Romans 6, “We were crucified with Christ and buried with Him in our Baptism.” And we have been raised to a new life in Christ; and the sting of death has been taken away from us forever.

All of the joy and relief in this letter has, as its focus, the promise of what has been won for you by the Son of God on the cross. Jesus is relief for your sins. He has lifted the burdens that you have no strength to lift on your own. Amen.