

“You Are Holy”

Philippians 2:1-18

As we are in the midst of spending a few weeks reading through Paul’s letter to the Philippians, it quickly becomes clear that he means for us, his readers, to be filled with encouragement. This letter is probably the most encouraging of all his writings. Ironically, this is written while he is sitting in prison for the terrible crime of being a Christian, and he has been a prisoner for some time – and he will remain a prisoner the rest of his life. Yet, he is filled with joy – not the happy euphoria that we often equate with “joy.” But rather, Paul is filled with relief – the lifting of burdens.

The joy Paul has is that no matter what may come, no matter what burdens or persecution or execution comes his way, whether he finds himself in a time of need or a time of having plenty, he is filled with joy and relief. Whether or not Paul will ever get to see the good people of Philippi again, what is important is that they, together, remain in the faith of the Word which Christ has given – that He has died for our sake, and He is risen so that whether I live or whether I die, I do so to the Lord.

So, last week, we heard Paul begin his letter to the Philippians saying I desire to die and be with Christ – complete communion and fellowship with Christ – which is better by far.

However, I know that I have “fruitful labor” here in Christ’s church on earth. “Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you.”

And this clear Gospel of Jesus dying and rising being the only thing that matters is what we joyfully and boldly tell everyone who will listen – even telling it to those who stand against us; even if our telling them will inspire them to kill us. What is happening in the Middle East these days is shocking to us, yet it is the history of the people of God. We, simply, have chosen to ignore it throughout most of our lives. In the country of Sudan alone, two million Christians have been killed since 1950.

There is no glorious life of faith for the people of God here on earth. Don’t listen to the TV preachers or anyone else who tries to sell you that “Gospel of Prosperity.” It is not for us to see the glory. We believe the glory. It is coming, but not in our journey here on earth. “To live is Christ, to die is to gain.”

So all of what Paul has been talking about is concerning Jesus and what He has done; what He has provided by His suffering. I would make sense that what follows is also all about Jesus.

So Paul says, “If there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation (koinonia) in the Spirit.” We are going to spend some time on this word this week and next week because it shows up again. This is a favorite word of St. Paul.

Koinonia can mean “participation” here, so long as we realize that you and I are not the ones causing the active participation. The word can also refer to community, a fellowship – like in *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*. If you read the books or saw the movies, their “fellowship” is a good demonstration of “koinonia.”

The dictionary definition is to “share with someone in something.” In I Corinthians, this is the Holy Communion word. We have “koinonia.” But we only have this because of the presence of Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit. We have a real union and communion and participation, but we aren’t the ones making it happen. This is God’s work in you.

It is similar to what we have been talking about in a few of my Bible classes lately. What does it mean to be “holy.” Holiness, biblically speaking, is about proximity to God. When Moses was instructed to take off his sandals because the place where he was standing was “holy ground,” there was nothing special about that dirt. It was just that the dirt was in close proximity to God in the burning bush.

When Moses met with God and he would come back to tell the people what the Lord had said, his face would be glowing, not by virtue of his own goodness, but he had gotten closer to the divine and the lingering radiance remained. That is holiness. The people of Israel were holy because God was in the middle of them. And He was continually cleansing them of their unrighteousness, taking their sins upon Himself so that a blood

sacrifice had to be made each year to make atonement for the Ark of the Covenant – the footstool of God.

Most people today speak of “holiness” as if it is the same as “righteousness” – being justified, then being led by the Spirit of God to do good works, conducting your life according to the commandments of God. That is not holiness; that is righteousness.

Holiness is about proximity, closeness to God. We are to read, mark, learn and “inwardly digest” the Word of the Gospel. We are to have a participation (koinonia) in the broken body and shed blood of Christ.

It is beyond fantastic that we offer Holy Communion in each of our worship services each weekend. The actual body and blood, given and shed for you on the cross; the broken body and shed blood of the Son of God is here in close proximity to you each and every week. The Holy Spirit has called you by the Gospel and enlightened you with His gifts of Word and Sacrament. That is holiness.

Holy Communion – participation in the close proximity of God happens here because the Word of God is joined to bread and wine. Christ says, “Take; eat; this is My body. Take; drink; this is My blood.” God physically enters you in a way in which even Moses did not get to participate.

Draw near and partake of the body and blood of the Lord. You are holy. Amen.