

“MY PEACE I GIVE TO YOU”

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Phil 1:3-11
John 16:17-33
February 22, 2009

Once in a while, I like to share with you some of the experiences the members of our Church family are going through. Let me tell you a few stories about the last couple of weeks and yes I do have permission to tell these stories. A couple of people have approached me who have recently lost their jobs. Two of them were working for a company that had never laid off employees before. But times are tough and for small companies the bottom line is paying the bills, keeping a roof over their family's head and food on their table consequently some employees get their *'pink slip.'* I met with a woman who is struggling with chronic fatigue syndrome and she finds it impossible to do her job and she may have to go on long term disability. The problem is you look at her and her affliction is not apparent. I had a conversation with a mother and a little boy that has to undergo brain scans to find out what is causing minor seizures. I had communion a little while ago with a woman who is going through her second battle with breast cancer. The radiation treatment has been tough and she waits on a long list hoping for surgery so the pain will be relieved. I prayed with a couple (who are clearly devoted to each other) this past week because the doctor found cancer in the wife's breast and now she is waiting for surgery and so they hold hands and hope. This past week on the way home from a meeting I discovered that one of our beloved senior members

was in the hospital with mysterious internal bleeding. A few of weeks ago a parishioner began experiencing chest pains and has recently been diagnosed with heart problems and is awaiting more tests. Two weeks ago, the husband of a couple I married this year was suddenly facing heart surgery. Every Sunday morning, I anoint and pray with a man who had knee surgery a year ago and is still waiting for relief of pain and healing. A little while ago I had communion with a mother who is grieving over some very misguided decisions her daughter is making in her life. Unfortunately her daughter lives a great distance from Victoria so communication and maternal guidance is difficult.

The reason I am telling you all these stories is that in the midst of life, furious storms erupt and from time to time they attempt to overwhelm us. It has been like that for a number of people in this Church and then on top of their own personal storms, we have been engaged in a storm of our own. In the last couple of weeks, I have exchanged emails, telephone calls and had a number of one on one conversations with many who are struggling with the discernment exercise we have been going through. I do have very good news about our process; sooner than you think we will break through the ribbon at the finish line.

One of the very interesting things that I have discovered as we have gone through this process is how many of you have been very kind in asking about the Staff, the Wardens, the leaders of our Discernment Team, the Parish Council, Rodney and myself. I want you to know on their behalf that we are all absolutely fine. We have not said very much unless we have been asked because we wanted this process to be your process and we are very proud of the work

you have completed. As you have been very concerned about us, we also have been so concerned about you. We know that this has been difficult process and we are very proud of your commitment to prayer, fasting and the other sacrifices you have made as we have tried to discern our way through these troubled days. I want you to hear how grateful your leadership team is for each one of you. Since they all cannot stand here and offer their individual thanks I am pleased to do it on their behalf.

Permit me to be bold enough to say to you that I feel a little bit like the Apostle Paul who wrote this Epistle while in prison and I will take the liberty of using his words from our Epistle this morning: **“I thank my God every time I remember you, saints of St. Matthias. In all my prayers for each of you, I always pray with joy because of our partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in us will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”** (Phil 1:3-6) I hope you know that you are delightful brothers and sisters in Christ and are very easy to love. I love your genuine care and consideration for each other. I love how you listen to and are sensitive with each another, even when you do not necessarily agree with another’s point of view. I love how you meet together in home groups, Bible Study groups, book clubs, opera groups, golf groups, cooking groups, knitting groups and the list goes on and on. With your social fellowship, your Bible studies and your prayers, you have learned to bear each others burdens. I love on Sunday morning when we go to pray for someone and anoint them with oil how you automatically gather around them and lay your hands on them and

join in the prayers. I love how you open your homes to each other and bless each other. I **love** our partnership in the Gospel. It is not just Clergy in this Church who preach the Gospel. Many of you preach it by your lifestyle and your example; you are living, walking Gospel messages. Our partnership in the Gospel is reflected in your tithes and offerings so that we can send missionaries off into the mission field. Our partnership in the Gospel is reflected in our reaching out to overseas work and work locally among the poor as well as in hospitals and care homes. You are true Ambassadors for the cause of Jesus Christ and for the building of His Kingdom.

One of my great joys is coming here on Sunday morning and from my position up here, I get to watch you, and you are beautiful to behold. I love watching you **'listen'** to the sermon; watching you **'sing'** the music, watching you **'read'** the lessons, watching you **'pray'** the prayers and finally watching you coming with outstretched hands to receive the broken body and poured out blood of Jesus Christ. One of the privileges of a long pastorate is watching the hand of God in your lives. You may not appreciate it and you may even disagree and think that I am not talking about you, but year after year, I see Christ being formed in each one of you. Yes, in your life! I confess to you that I boast about you all the time. I boast about you in my conversations with God, I boast about you to my colleagues, I boast about you in my prayer journal and I boast about you in my personal prayers. You are easy to boast about because you are people of Grace and when I stand up here I see God's Grace in your lives and I think who am I to deserve a congregation like you? Why has God blessed me by putting **'you'** in my life? I stand in

amazement as I see God transforming your lives-it's not my work or your work, it is God's work and it is a mystery and a wonder to behold.

I don't want you to think that I am naïve and I think you are all perfect. Of course I don't, but I know that you are on the road to perfection and with Paul **"I am very, very confident that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ."** (6)

I guess what I am trying to say to you this morning is that I appreciate and love you and I understand Paul when he says in verse eight, **"that God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Jesus Christ."** I long for Christ's work to be completed in you and so I pray as Paul does in verses 9-11: **"I pray that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.** God not only wants us to grow in affection for one another and for Him, He also wants us to grow in knowledge and insight about who we are as children of God. I love those words that God is making us pure and blameless. Why is he doing that? He is getting us ready for the **Day of His coming.** The Father with the Holy Spirit is getting us ready for the glory of His Son-the Son to whom our knee will bow and our tongue will confess that **"Jesus Christ is Lord"** to the **'Glory of God the Father.'**

In our Gospel lesson this morning, Jesus is nearing the very end of His ministry and the writer John uses chapters 13-17 to reveal

to us Jesus' intimate time with His disciples. He is leaving them and they are confused because they do not want Him to go away. Who would ever want Jesus to go away? But Jesus has to go away, because He has a mission to complete. He has come into the world to die for the sins of the world and as He said earlier in this Gospel, the **'hour is at hand.'** I had that long passage read this morning, just so you could hear it, but it is the very last verse in that chapter I want to draw to your attention: **"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble or tribulation, but take heart! I have overcome the world."** (16:33) Jesus, our Messiah, our King of Kings and Lord of Lords has overcome all the trials and tribulations of this world and when He finished, He sat down at the right hand of the Father and He now spends His days and His nights praying for us. Yes, He is praying for you, for me, for this Church and for our discernment process. What a Savior!

I am going to conclude early this morning and I want to go back to the very beginning of my sermon and I want to ask a couple of people to stand and to listen to me very closely: A___ and ___, **"in this world, you will have tribulation, but take heart, Jesus has overcome the world."** L___ **"in this world, you will have tribulation, but take heart, Jesus has overcome the world."** R___ **"in this world, you will have tribulation, but take heart, Jesus has overcome the world."** M___ **"in this world, you will have tribulation, but take heart, Jesus has overcome the world."** S___ & J___ **"in this world, you will have tribulation, but take heart, Jesus has overcome the world."** R___ and D___ **"in this world,**

you will have tribulation, but take heart, Jesus has overcome the world.” R_____ “in this world, you will have tribulation, but take heart, Jesus has overcome the world.” M_____ “in this world, you will have tribulation, but take heart, Jesus has overcome the world.” K_____ “in this world, you will have tribulation, but take heart, Jesus has overcome the world.” B_____ “in this world, you will have tribulation, but take heart, Jesus has overcome the world.”

Would you all now please stand and let me give you a final word from the Lord and again it is from the Gospel of John. My brothers and sisters in Christ, this morning Jesus says to each of you: **“In this world, you will have tribulation, but take heart, Jesus has overcome the world.” “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14:27)**

References:

New International Version of the Holy Scriptures