

Philippians 3: 7-21 - Growing joy...

Philippians 3:

7 But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. 10 I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I **press on** to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and **straining** towards what is ahead, 14 I **press** on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has **called** me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.

15 All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. 16 Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

17 **Join together** in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. 18 For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. 20 **But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour** from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 **who**, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, **will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.**

A new start - pressing onward/following...

St. Paul goes in strong here - v 7-11 are a statement of 'nothing else matters'... everything else is ***rubbish...***!

Yet - he also carries over some of the previous themes again... it builds, there is a crescendo in his text... To me it also builds on the foundational theology of the Church Life Review... Jeremiah 29: 7 - "the good of the land is good for you too" (I paraphrase!)... in that, all this is for the good of furthering the work of the Kingdom of God...

The growing in this passage, it seems to me, is around a what, how, why, and when...

If that is the 'What'... then comes a series of 'How'... words like;

- Press on... Strain... (and again) Press on...

Words that are about perseverance and grabbing hold of opportunities... that to which we are called as the people of God...

Then comes the 'Why'... that we live up to what we have already attained... words like;

- Mature... Already attained...

Words that are about the grounding we have - our rootedness, foundations built up, our established place, and are about the things which enable us to proceed... our direction of travel as followers of Jesus...

And then comes the 'So that'...

Words that are responsive to calling and direction and allow us to hold **Hope**...

This (from v17 - 21) feels like a new start... a new hope (in a galaxy far far away) if you will... a new life (and I'm feeling good [about it!])...

And what are the words? They are words about **the one** "who,...will transform [us into the likeness of glory]..." (my paraphrase)...

Nothing matters (it's all garbage) - keep going (strive), in/with me (join together), and be transformed (our citizenship is in heaven)...

When we live in this way, when we listen to and follow God faithfully (and take the appropriate risks that we've discerned are right to take), we can **know** our future hope.

This is about flourishing... this is a word to encourage and revitalise the community at Philippi.. and I contend that it is a word to encourage The United Reformed Church as they, you, we, progress this Church Life Review into its next phase...

For me this links back to our Christ-likeness conversation yesterday... Because we are a people who believe in the possibility of the transformation of the body into something beautiful and incorruptible like the body of the risen Lord. If it sounds like wishful thinking, look at the transformations that take place within the physical world... Look at a dormant bulb in the garden in autumn and then at the brilliantly coloured but fragile crocus, or daffodil or tulip, in the springtime that follows. If God is God as we understand God to be, then can such simple joys be impossible? No. And the extension of that is that more complex joys may come too...

This is the challenge St Paul places before us; this is the implication of faith in Christ. God is God, and this is our way to untold joy.

We are about to embark upon the season of Advent, a hugely important season in the life of the church, yet there is sometimes a tendency to rush through, rush to get to the wonderful moment at the end when we stand together and sing "o come let us adore him!", to rush past the harder moments, rush past the trials, the waiting and preparation to get to the joy of baby at the end! I suggest that we need to slow down and see the kind of transformation Jesus offers. In struggle, in hard and painful times, and in celebration, joy and delight, we are to follow the call of God, and in doing that the world is forever changed.

Yes, sounds easy... the reality being that; "joy does not simply happen to us. We have to choose joy and keep choosing it every day"... yet the 'reward', the transformative outcome of that daily action...? Hope and a future...

We are growing joy.

AMEN.