

PASTOR'S NOTES.

"I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now.

*I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my **imprisonment** and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus.*

And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God."

Philippians 1:3-11 (NRSV)

I have fought against writing this for at least a week; I have not wanted to get bogged down in talking about the semi-quarantine that we have been living in. It has led to a few of us already having been touched by the virus and likely more of us to come. If you are like me, you have had enough of it. At the same time, I also can't help but notice the similarities between our situation and that of the apostle Paul.

We believe that Paul wrote his letters to the Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon (and maybe 2 Timothy) while he was a prisoner. His early imprisonments were in jails, but his imprisonment at Rome would have looked more like a house arrest: staying in a rented home, albeit with a long chain and a guard present. Persons were allowed to visit and run errands for him; and most likely they could speak to each other in Aramaic, while the guard would likely only understand Latin and Greek.

One of the effects of this time is that Paul's circle of friends and acquaintances has shrunk. Probably he often felt isolated and alone. In spite of what would have been discouraging times, Paul still writes to offer prayers and encourage others, realizing that the Spirit can work in people's lives even if he is not physically present.

It should give us pause to remember that his words of encouragement and his prayers even while imprisoned have endured almost two thousand years (so far). Why is that? Perhaps our prayers and encouragement have far more value than we realize, even for those at the outer edge of our circle. So this might be as good a time as any to ask ourselves, **today, what can I offer to my circle that will endure?**

You have certainly been a source of encouragement for me, in your prayers, your words, and other gifts. I believe that this is one of the things I will remember about this confined time when looking back on it in the future. This passage near the end of Paul's letter perhaps says it as well as I ever could, and perhaps we can see why it has endured:

“I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through Him Who strengthens me. In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress.”

Philippians 4:10-14 (NRSV)

This is not an easy time to be content. However, just as you have “shared my distress”, I pray that we can continue to share with others. At the heart of this is remembering the supreme gift to us in Jesus Christ, Who is our strength, our hope, and Who is still here with us. Thank you for being you and thanks be to God for Who He is.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the name 'Ken' written in a cursive style.