

## 15/10/2023 Philippians 4:1-9

### Church Conflict

- The reality of church conflict:
- Often over things that are not to do with church teaching.
- What can happen?
- Taking sides
- People leaving
- A feeling of despondency

### Good News

- Our joy is in *the Lord* – in *his* victory
- Even in conflict we can have peace with God
- And we can see how God shapes us together as people
- Whose names are written in the book of life.

Listen to how the reading starts:

**Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.**

- Note the personal language.
- *The congregation* as the joy and crown.
- The Gospel St Paul proclaims is not about concepts of God
- But the power of God to create loving community.

This is important because:

- St Paul is in captivity
- And there is conflict in Philippi

The conflict is between two leading women of the congregation:

**I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.**

- The same mind *in the Lord*
- Suggests this is not about teaching
- But the sort of conflict that can be subordinated
- To their mutual faith in Christ.
- Good for us to pause and think: how are things for us?
- Do we have people in the church with whom we are in conflict?
- St Paul asks for help from the ‘loyal yokefellow’
- Also: he does not attack the women’s integrity
- Or the genuineness of their faith:
- Their names are written in the ‘book of life’
- On this point, consider Jesus saying to his disciples:
- **‘Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.’** Luke 10:20
- Also: Revelation 20:15

It’s now that we hear these famous words:

- **Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.**
- Again, note the context: conflict.
- The joy is not in the conflict as such
- But in *the Lord*: in *his* victory.
- One way to understand this:
- Rejoicing in the victory of a sports team.
- Perhaps there are many lamentable aspect in one’s own life

- But the focus at the game is outward
- The rejoicing is in the victory
- Note: *how* does one rejoice?
- The rejoicing is communal
- It involves ritual
- There is confidence: the Geelong baby boom!

From this St Paul presents us with two paths of peace

- When we face difficulties like conflict:
- **Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**
- Note: the Lord is near: he is at hand to help
- Prayer, supplication, and thanksgiving:
- Asking God for what we need; for what we want
- Giving thanks to God for what we have received
- This is a path of peace from God

Then there is what we focus on in life

- Where we direct our attention: what we think about:
- **Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.**
- This is not theoretical, but takes a definite shape
- And St Paul presents himself as an example to be followed

- **Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.**
- As we follow the example of those mature in the faith
- God gives his peace.
- Not that St Paul or other mature Christians are perfect
- But they show us that the Christian faith can be lived
- And that we ourselves can grow in maturity
- That this is the path of peace for us.

We have life together as a gift from God

- We should not be surprised at conflict, even in the church
- Our joy is in Christ Jesus, in his victory
- Since he is near, let us call out to him
- And receive his peace
- Since he gives us brothers and sisters to imitate
- Including in confessing sin and asking for forgiveness
- Let us follow their example.
- And the peace of God which passes all understanding
- Will guard your hearts and minds
- Safe in Christ Jesus. Amen!