

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church Des Moines, WA July 21, 2013

Philippians 1:3-11

Rejoice in the Partnership We Share!

1. A partnership similar to Philippi's
2. A partnership visible this morning
3. A partnership throughout our Wisconsin Synod

Hymns: 221 – 494 – Distribution: 452, 536 –
334 – Closing: 379

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

Philippians 1:3-11 –

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer: 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.

In the business world, achieving the rank of “partner” is a sought-after goal. If you are a partner in the company, perks follow: Spacious offices, private restrooms, and fancy services. But more important than that is the level of involvement, commitment, and ownership that you have in the company. A partner is a valued individual whose voice and opinion mean much. They help guide the direction of the company. The term “partner” means a lot in general

relationships as well, exuding warmth, whether a card game is involved or a round of golf.

Partners are different from “customers.” Customers will quickly go elsewhere when there's a better deal to be found. Partners are even different from “employees.” Employees will jump ship when the going gets rough. But partners? They are involved, committed, and passionate.

On this day when we are welcoming a group of Sudanese believers into our congregation, we are going to focus on the word “partnership.” Our thoughts are based on the Apostle Paul's words in Philippians 1 as we consider the theme, “**Rejoice in the Partnership We Share!**”

1. A partnership similar to Philippi's
2. A partnership visible here this morning
3. A partnership throughout our Wisconsin Synod

1. A partnership similar to Philippi's

Paul wrote in our text today, “*I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*” He wrote those words to a church he had founded in the city of Philippi. It sure seems Paul had some strong feelings for these people! The fact is, Paul's history with this church was a very unique story. Here are the basics:

- Some of you might remember that on his 2nd Missionary Trip, Paul had a divine vision from God to go west into Greece. He had wanted to travel north, but received this vision where a man said to him, “Come over to Macedonia (Greece) and help us!” When Paul followed that call and crossed the Aegean Sea into Europe, the first city he worked in was Philippi.
- Philippi was a very “Roman” city. It was an important outpost for the Roman Empire where many military men

retired. It had no Jewish synagogue, which was where Paul usually began his work. He heard there was a place down by the river where people met to pray, so went outside of town to meet whoever might be there. And there he met a small group of women, who would form the beginnings of the church in Philippi.

- One of the women, Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth, insisted that Paul and his missionary partners stay at her house.
- As Paul wrote the words of our reading, he also had the vivid memory of being thrown into prison soon after arriving in Philippi. He suffered this because he cast an evil spirit out of a slave girl, angering her owners. In prison, the Lord sent a midnight earthquake that shook them loose in the jail. The jailer there asked him the famous question, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" to which Paul replied, "Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved." And the jailer and his entire family were baptized.
- This church at Philippi had continued to financially support Paul's work after he left their city and moved on. In fact, Paul later comments that they were the only church that did this for him. At the time he is writing this letter, they have just sent him a gift because they've heard he is in prison at Rome. They also are sending a helper for Paul with their gift and their greetings, evoking this letter back to them.

It's clear that Paul had quite a partnership with the church at Philippi! It was no business partnership. It was no casual partnership. It was a spiritual partnership. Their partnership was based on the message that Paul taught from the Scriptures. It began with a message of law. A sinful world needed a Messiah. Sinners, including those who lived in Philippi, needed a Savior who would win salvation for people who could not win it for themselves. The message of the promised Messiah was very familiar to people who knew the Old Testament in Paul's

day. Paul brought the message that Jesus Christ came, the Son of God himself, to serve as the world's Savior and suffer and die so that sin would be paid for. *"The blood of Jesus his Son purifies us from all sin."* (1 John 1:9) **The One who had no partner in his saving work had given them a reason for hope and a reason to rejoice together. That is what their partnership was based on!**

What are his feelings as he writes them this letter? He says:

- **v. 3** – *"I thank my God every time I remember you."* Paul told them that he thanked the Lord for them!
- **v. 4** – *"In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy."* Paul prayed for them, and prayed with joy.
- **vv. 7a,8** – *"It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart... God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus."* Paul told them that he had Christian love and affection for them.
- **vv. 5a,7b** – *"I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now... Whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me."* Paul told them that he considered them partners with him in what he was doing. He did not feel like a "Lone Ranger missionary." Rather, he knows that they went with him in spirit wherever he went, for they were his sharers and partners in the faith and in his work!

2. A partnership visible here this morning

I can't help but think of Paul's words and his feelings as I consider Holy Trinity's situation today. First, think about our partnership. God has gathered us together in a partnership that is the same as the one in Philippi. He does not make "Lone Ranger Christians."

Our partnership is not based on social status. Our partnership is not based on level of wealth. Our partnership is not based on culture. Our

partnership is not based on similar hobbies and interests. Our partnership, which has gathered people together here who actually are very different from each other in background, is a spiritual partnership. It is based on the message that we are sinners in need of forgiveness. It is based on Jesus Christ, who is that Savior from sin. It is based on all the teachings that God has revealed, from creation to morality to the Scripture's teachings about marriage and to all the other doctrines of God's Word. **We have a partnership that is similar to the church in Philippi!**

We can praise God that he has gathered us together to enjoy many benefits in our partnership:

- Worship that strengthens our faith
- Bible study together in the Word
- Prayers with each other and for each other
- Love and encouragement that we can enjoy in this hostile world
- Help that we can give each other in difficult times
- Witnessing that we do to others, inviting them here to hear God's Word

How God has blessed our church in the past 50 years in our partnership!

I think Paul's words are also very fitting for us to focus on today because of the unique reason to rejoice this morning. God has brought us together with this group of Sudanese people who are ready to become members of our congregation. For about six months they have been worshipping with us. For many months they have been learning the truths of God's Word that we confess. And today they are ready to declare their fellowship and partnership with us. What a blessing! Do you think the founders of our congregation ever envisioned something like this happening?

I can't help but also think of the Korean congregation connected with us as well. They have been meeting for worship here for 12 years, and have had a partnership that we should never take for granted. What a blessing!

Let's not forget about the other cultures that we have united with us: Hispanic, African American, and more. It reminds me of the vision of heaven that God granted the Apostle John in Revelation, where he writes, "*After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb" (Revelation 7).*

What a reason to rejoice today! How blessed we are that God has united us all in a partnership that strengthens us against the world's culture of immorality, greed, and other vices. This partnership we have touches our hearts like it touched Paul's heart, and we thank God for it!

3. A partnership throughout our Wisconsin Synod

We can't quite stop there this morning. Our partnership extends a bit farther. The wider partnership that we share is the fellowship we have in our Wisconsin Synod. We saw how this was a blessing in a direct way with this group of Sudanese believers we have met.

Perhaps some of you know how that partnership began. It happened 163 years ago in 1850. In the southeast area of Wisconsin, many German immigrants had settled who were gathering into congregations but had very few pastors. Current and future pastors to shepherd God's people were very uncertain. Also, the desire to band together in a fellowship was very strong. So the Wisconsin Synod was formed by five pastors who shepherded 15 congregations. An effort to start a college and seminary for future pastors was a priority. Becoming united on doctrine among themselves was a bit of a process that took over a decade. After the school was started in Watertown, WI and the synod was well established, world mission work began in the 1890's beginning among the Apache Indians in Arizona. If you'd like an easy read on this

fascinating history, check out the book in our church library, "Our Church: Its Life and Mission."

Today, we continue to enjoy many things as we are partners in our Wisconsin Synod:

- We train the next generation of pastors, teachers, and missionaries together through our school system
- We do world mission work together in places where you can't go yourself
- We open home mission churches in our country, helping to fund these new starts
- We operate a publishing house that produces sound doctrinal books, Bible studies, and worship materials
- And we are connected for mutual encouragement and correction

How blessed we are to have this partnership, which I think we often take for granted as we live far from our synod's center!

We saw some real blessings in this wider partnership as we got to know our Sudanese friends and as Pastor Voss thought about steps in how to bring them into our church. After looking for some help and direction, we found out that other large Sudanese groups are in Des Moines, IA and Omaha, NE. There are also groups in Minnesota. As Pastor Voss talked with our fellow pastors there, it was very helpful in that it gave insight on methods of instruction. It was also great to find out that the group that came to us were relatives from the same sub-clan as the people in IA and NE. That meant that this group already knew about the WELS and had a basic understanding of what they would be getting.

The connection will also be very helpful moving forward as there is already a Sudanese man going through the Pastoral Studies Institute program at our seminary. Sudanese groups meet quarterly to discuss Sudanese ministry and the potential of a mission in South Sudan.

What a reason to rejoice in the wider partnership that we have in our Wisconsin Synod!

So what now? What's ahead? Lacking the omniscience of our God, we don't know the details of the future, just like the people in our congregation have never known how God will bless. Yet we do this:

- We enjoy the worship and fellowship of our church that God has blessed us with, and praise him that we have salvation in our Savior Jesus.
- We rejoice today in the many people and cultures that God has brought together here at Holy Trinity, especially today in the group of Sudanese people
- We will invite others to come to hear God's Word here and come to know their Savior from sin also.
- We pray for God's continued blessing on our congregation and on our synod. Without his blessing, all our own plans will fail!

May God lead us to do this all, and may he continue to be with us. And may you never forget that you are... a partner! Amen.