

Philippians 1:1-11  
***Abounding More and More***  
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11-18-18

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Paul and Timothy, servants<sup>[a]</sup> of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers<sup>[b]</sup> and deacons:<sup>[c]</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, <sup>4</sup> always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, <sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. <sup>6</sup> And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. <sup>7</sup> It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace,<sup>[d]</sup> both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. <sup>8</sup> For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. <sup>9</sup> And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, <sup>10</sup> so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, <sup>11</sup> filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

"What is REAL?" asked the Rabbit one day. This is the probing question asked in the opening pages of the beloved children's book, *The Velveteen Rabbit*. Rabbit had long looked around at the other toys in the toy cupboard and wondered if he mattered to anyone. Rabbit couldn't claim to be a model of anything, and he was filled only with sawdust—which was itself quite out of date. He wasn't put together by anyone special or significant like the wooden lion.

What is REAL? "Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?" "Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real." ***Real happens when someone really loves you.***

This morning I want to talk with you about how community, and how relationships become real.

Now, either Paul is the king of hyperbole, of over exaggeration, or he really, really loves this congregation. It seems clear from these words that Paul really is absolutely smitten by this little church. Always in every prayer of mine I thank God for you. He goes on to say that he holds them in his heart. Paul is physically separated from them, but they are one in Spirit.

Do you have someone, a friend perhaps, who you have this kind of deep appreciation for? Someone who helps you know the feeling of being REAL, someone with whom you've lived so closely in this life together that you sort of rub off on one another?

I have a roommate from college who does quite a bit of traveling professionally, and often when he's in an airport somewhere I'll get a text from him saying: "I'm in \_\_\_\_\_. Thinking of you, praying for you, love you." I love these texts because in that moment the distance that exists between us geographically is gone and it's as if we're right back together again. The Philippians are deeply beloved by Paul, their meaning and value to one another is REAL.

But the appreciation that Paul has for them is rooted in more than just agreement on an idea, or philosophy. Paul's deep love for them is rooted in the fact that they are also, as the ESV translates, partakers of the grace of Jesus Christ with him. Like Paul they have been transformed by a relationship with Jesus Christ. Their bond of friendship, their loyalty, and unity is deeper than a feeling, it transcends a social or legal contract, it is the real and physical reality of Christ living in their midst.

It's clear that Paul really does love this congregation. He goes on to say: For God as my witness, how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. This word here for affection is a little misleading, it sounds like the kind of word you use when you're signing a greeting card for someone who you are not quite close enough with to say I love you. But the Greek word here is the word *Splankna* is an interesting one, it literally means to be moved with compassion in the depths of one's bowels. Paul is saying I yearn for you with the affection from the depths of my being.

This kind of love does not come about haphazardly. This is the kind of love that only comes when we suffer with, the word compassion literally means with suffering.

I know this experience of having an affection so deep, one that comes from the depths of my being, one that has come about only through the sharing deep struggle and pain. I know what it is to feel this kind of affection towards a community, because we feel this way towards you. As I was reflecting with a friend this week, I was looking back over the last 7 years and realizing that there has hardly been a season when we did not know some sort of struggle or hardship. From an initial melanoma diagnosis 7 years ago about this time; to an accident that sent us into a tailspin; to a season of health challenges and uncertainty that has made us feel as though we were imprisoned in a circumstance from which we could not free ourselves.

All of this has given us this deep down, visceral, gut level affection for you, because you have suffered along with us. When we think about you, when we talk about you to others, when we hold you in our prayers, we feel this deep longing of compassion and affection for you.

This feeling Paul has does not come on its own, it comes from a life that is connected to Jesus Christ. Jesus has these same feeling t in Matthew 9 when he saw crowds of people who needed healing and was moved with compassion; or in Mark 1 when he saw and healed a man with leprosy; or in Luke 7 when he encountered a widow whose son had died and he had compassion on her and raised her son; or in Luke 15 when the Prodigal Son returned, the father was moved with compassion and ran to his long lost boy. This compassion and affection we feel for others comes when we share in one another's suffering.

Paul loved this congregation, because they continued to love and support him when his fur and his stuffing were worn and tattered and coming apart at the seams. This is the Splunkna that only comes from knowing the savior who suffers with and for us.

So it is out of this deep appreciation, the deep affection, that Paul offers a prayer for them.

Paul prays that your love may overflow more and more. That your love would overflow the banks and that it would run over into the lands nourishing and feeding and bringing life to all that is around it. Which means that the Philippians are in a growth pattern, that the good work that is

being done will continue on, they are not done, God is not finished with them, they have not arrived. This is my prayer, he says that you love would well up and overflow in:

Knowledge: the word here for knowledge does not just mean knowledge of facts and ideas. But it is the word *epignosko*. Gnosis-knowledge, and epi is a prefix that implies everywhere or in every direction. Paul is praying that they would grow in their knowledge in *all* directions. And what I believe he is saying there is that they would grow in their understanding and knowledge of how God is alive and at work in them in every direction, and in every way, and in every relationship. This word implies integration of knowledge, knowledge that permeates and crosses borders and boundaries within our lives. I pray that you would not just know about God, but that you would have a deep relationship with God that would spill over into all areas of your life.

In addition to knowledge Paul prays for full insight, that is discernment. I want you to have this deep knowledge and relationship with God and to know him through his Word and through revelation. But I also want you to have depth of wisdom and discernment to know what is right and what is wrong, what is best and then be able to choose it. This is a different kind of knowledge, it's an understanding up here, but it also an understanding down here (heart). It is a sensitivity to the Holy Spirit that is so acute that the mind of Christ lives not only here but here.

Love for Paul is not just the ability to know things about God, or to believe certain intellectual truths, nor is about feeling warm fuzzies about God. But that our love would be seasoned with discernment that would spill over into the decisions we make, how we use our time and our resources. Because always, always, God's grace has to do with how we live. God's grace influences our priorities and decisions.

The question of our response to God's gifts is all over the bible. It's when God's love becomes REAL, when it comes alive in us. We can see it come alive in the story of the beginning of the Philippian Church. In Acts 16 when Paul originally set up the church in Philippi, Lydia the business woman who received Christ with her family, her first response is to open up her home and invite them in, practicing hospitality. And in the same chapter the Philippian jailer, when he received the grace of God, his first response is to bandage up the wounds of Paul and Silas.

Grace leads to actions, to fruit. Fruit does not earn grace, but grace bears fruit. And so Paul prays that the grace they received in Christ would bear itself out in their world, in their lives, in your workplace, and in your neighborhood and in your relationships and in your family. Paul prays, as you become alive to Jesus Christ and his life rubs off on you, that your life would rub off on others. So that we would be people who can discern what is best, and then do it, and that when Christ returns we might be found living well, filled with the fruit of righteousness in Jesus Christ and overflowing with the mercy and compassion of him, to the praise and glory of God.

I think the best way to enter the kingdom of God is looking like the Velveteen Rabbit, sort of worn out, coming apart at the seams, our fur matted and stained from use. We become real because someone really loves you. You become and real when the love of Jesus Christ becomes real to you.

And so as we come to the time in our worship on this Stewardship Sunday where we bring our pledges and dedications forward

It's what

Matthew 9 crowds of people needing healing

Mark 1 Man with

Luke 7 Widow son died

Luke Good Samaritan

Luke 15 Prodigal son who returns

I was thinking this week about

Inklings professors oxford dons scholars d

When Jesus invites them to partake of his body in the Eucharist, they literally take into their bodies his life when they gather for worship. This is my body given for you. The blood that was poured out on Calvary, given as the atoning sacrifice for the forgiveness of my sin and yours, Paul's sin and theirs, is the grace that they share and partake of together.

In the same way that the Philippians have accepted and received the good news of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, they have also accepted and received the passion and suffering of Jesus Christ, on the night in which he was betrayed. What both Paul and the Philippians are partakers of is Jesus Christ himself

club, it's more than just a mutual affirmation and agreement that Paul shares with the Philippians. For Paul belonging to Christ is both an radical shift in identity (you were bought with a price, you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ, once you were not and now you are???) but it is also, as we saw last week, a radical shift in our responsibility to one another. When Jesus gathered his disciples together in the upper room on the night he was arrested, he explained that as we partake of his body and his blood we are not only joined to him, but we are joined together. We are joined to him in his pain and suffering, and we are joined to him in his resurrection.

In sharing this friendship with the Philippians in Christ, Paul is joined to them in their good times, and bad. And they are joined to him, as it says, both in his imprisonment and in the confirmation of the gospel. In another one of his letters Paul says, in Galatians 6:3 that when you bear one another's burdens you fulfill the law of Christ. And the law of Christ is in its essence, love.

When Jesus gathered his disciples to him in the upper room, to share in the Last Supper, he invited them to partake of the bread and the juice. But in doing so what they were receiving into their bodies was the suffering of their Lord,

We come to know the grace of God in such different ways. For some of us we had a lightning bold conversion experience, and for others we have come from an intellectual background and have had tall philosophical hills to climb before we said yes, others of us come to Christ in a process.

As I was reading and praying through this passage this week I was drawn to this phrase in verse 7, when Paul says that this Philippian congregation are partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

Friendship has the ability to transcend time and space. There's a line from one of my favorite movies Interstellar, besides gravity, the only thing that has the ability to transcend time and space is love. There are friends in our life, and hopefully there are in yours as well, who, from time to time, will drop me a voicemail or text message telling me where they are in the world and that they love us.

But this kind of love that Paul is talking about isn't just a nice warm feeling, but a deep commonality grounded in what he calls "the partaking of grace." What binds them together is not just a common cause, a purpose, or a project, but the fact that they have all come to and understanding of the deep reality that grace, the grace of Jesus Christ binds them together.

We all arrive at a place of faith in Jesus Christ differently, for some it's lightning bolt conversion, for others it is an intellectual journey in which philosophers and theologians are their conversation partner, still others it is a long hard-fought journey to faith.

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Paul says that they partake of it together.

This word *partake* is an interesting one, when Jesus gathered his disciples together in the upper room on the night he was arrested, he explained that as we partake of his body and his blood we are not only joined to him, but we are joined together. We are joined to him in his pain and suffering, and we are joined to him in his resurrection. In sharing this friendship with the Philippians in

Christ, Paul is joined to them in their good times, and bad. And they are joined to him, as it says, both in his imprisonment and in the confirmation of the gospel.

There is a deep and inexplicable bond that is formed when we share in one another's struggles, it cultivates a love that longs, a love that yearns, a love that will pick up the phone when you're on the other side of the country and drop a text that just says I love you.

These are the questions asked in one of the great children's stories, the Velveteen Rabbit. Rabbit is asking the questions we all face, questions that invite us

It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense of the gospel.

As I was reading this, I was thinking about the different ways in which we come to faith in Jesus Christ. I have friends who have come from a very intellectual background, who have major hurdles to overcome to believe. Some who have had lightning bolt conversion experiences where one moment they did not and the next they did believe. Others come to Christ through a process. And I want to say that in whatever way you have made your way into this places, and for whatever reason you find yourself in worship today, Paul says that when we gather around this book, to listen to what it says, to soak in its words and wisdom and when we pray and sing praises and receive the physical manifestations of grace in the bread and the cup, we are partakers of grace together.