

READING

Philippians 2:12-30

SERMON

Meeting The Challenge Together (Philippians 2:12-30)

Being a minister I do get to do some exciting tasks. One task I am called on to do is the Passport application photo check. You know the one where I have to say that 'this is a good likeness of the person', sign it and then on the form put down my profession. I am used by people because I am a lot cheaper than the doctor. I can remember one man coming to me and asking me to do this service and I was pleased to do it for him. So I filled in the back of the photo and the bit on the form. I had known the man for about three years in a social capacity – we played snooker together! He then produced another form from his bag and asked if I would do the same for his wife. He was not very happy when I refused. It was not because I did not like his wife, but it was because I had, as far as I could recall, never met her!

Also as a minister requests for references come across my desk. There are those that send a letter saying so-and-so has applied for this job and could you write as to their suitability for the job saying how long you have known them and in what capacity. These are the 'make it up ones' and you are never really quite sure what they are looking for from you.

Then there are those who send the questionnaire, some now with multi-choice answers but it seems as if there is always that question where you want another choice of answer. However even with these there is always that question at the end which says, 'If you think any further information should be included in this reference, then do fill in below and if there is not enough room, then do continue on another sheet of paper.' I'm never quite sure how it looks if you do or don't fill in that part.

Paul writes of Timothy a sort of reference, verse 19 of chapter 2

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no-one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel.
(Philippians 2:19-22 NIV)

The reference of Timothy is here under three headings

1. Genuine Care for Others – the first thing that Paul mentions is his genuine care for others, even when he is not with them. Verse 20

I have no-one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare.
(Philippians 2:20 NIV)

Timothy cared for the people in Philippi. Do we care for people, do we take a genuine interest in others, or do we just pay lip service? Do we care for people whom we may not know, not even in our area.

As a church we financially support Home Mission. This is a fund which churches pay into so that churches who cannot afford a minister are given help to pay for a minister. But Home Mission is bigger than that. There are chaplaincies, there is other work of God that it supports. This last year 2005, the appeal was met, first time since 1979. Also once a quarter we get Home Mission News - this tells us about the work of Home Mission, of God at work in other places. Do we use it or ignore it?

The same is true with BMS World Mission. BMS World Mission is actively working with personnel, partners and co-operating agencies in over 35 countries worldwide. From the sprawling city of São Paulo to tribal groups in northern Thailand, and from Albania to Zimbabwe, BMS works to be culturally sensitive to each place, recognising the individual needs of an area and doing something about it. BMS is involved across four continents: Asia, Africa, the Americas and Europe. Again there are publications – do we use them or ignore them?

I have no-one else like Timothy, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare.
(Philippians 2:20 NIV)

Hopefully we have a genuine interest in others which extends outside of ourselves and also outside our immediate surroundings.

2. Genuine Love for Jesus – Timothy was always prepared to put God first. Verse 21

For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.
(Philippians 2:21 NIV)

Timothy had his priorities right. He looked to the interest of Jesus Christ. Timothy could have so easily left Paul there in Rome, in chains for it was not really a safe place to be in. If Paul is found guilty, then his associates might also be found guilty by association, but Timothy knew where his place should be, next to Paul.

Timothy's love for Jesus meant that he was prepared to suffer hardship for him. Are we? Or do we just do something because we enjoy it, because it does not really put us out?

3. Genuine Willingness to Serve – Timothy also had the heart of a servant and was willing to serve in any position. Verse 22

But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. (Philippians 2:22 NIV)

One of the most difficult things for a leader to do is to serve under someone else. There are those who are great leaders, but they make appalling second-in-commands.

There are also those who will do a task, are prepared to perform a duty if they gain the kudos from doing it. They do the job because they are noticed or they are commended for it in public. For some it is never easy to serve under someone but for Timothy who was a leader in his own right, was prepared to be a son to the father Paul. He was prepared to take on that subservient role.

Why do we do something, to serve the cause of the gospel, or to gain recognition from those around us? Take care when the title means more than the task because so often the task can be done without the title being shouted about.

So we have the reference about Timothy, but Paul also sends a reference about Epaphroditus, the one whom the people back home are worried about. The reference given by Paul is more in the way of titles, or roles he had done, messenger, brother, worker and soldier.

1. Messenger – he had come from Philippi and now was quite happy to return to them. In fact he was aching to go back, not for his own welfare but because his absence was causing distress back home. Verse 26

For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. (Philippians 2:26-28 NIV)

Again his thought was not for himself, but was for the people to whom he was causing distress and that was even when he was nearly dead because of his work for God

Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honour men like him, because *he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.* (Philippians 2:29-30 NIV)

Unfortunately we do not know the full story because Epaphroditus is only mentioned here in Philippians, but it seems that he was a risk taker and that this had caused some threat on his life. As Christians, as people of God we are called to be risk takers,

- to be risk takers in life style – to live a life differently to those around us. Prepared to live up to the standards of God, to the commands of Christ to follow him and follow his commands, **to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.** (Philippians 1:27 NIV)
- to be risk takers as a group in the way we include all people, and not just as some might say, 'those who are like us'.
- to be risk takers as a group and as individuals in taking stands against others which may be unpopular. By being like Jesus and by being identified as those who will mix with the social outcasts, and we need to remember that Jesus did not turn anyone away because they were a prostitute, a tax-collector who had defrauded people out of their money, sinners of any description who need him.

Hopefully we too can take similar risks for God

2. **Brother** – Between Paul and Epaphroditus there was this family connection, this family feeling. They were brothers together in Christ. Paul describes his relationship with Timothy as one of father and son, with Epaphroditus it was brother to brother. There are times when we talk about being family together and that is a right picture of the church, or at least one picture of the church that is right. As a family we talk to each other, as a family we sort things out which maybe come between us, as a family we are there for one another, as a family we are different, but together, we belong, we accept in Christ.
3. **Worker** – Epaphroditus was not a spectator, but a worker. It would have been easy for him to have not really get involved with Paul, because he was just the messenger – the job's worth sort who only did the minimum. So often people try to do the minimum at work and this carries over to church, to God. God does not want spectators, but players, workers who will work for him. Can we be described as a worker?
4. **Soldier** – Epaphroditus was also a soldier. Soldiers are in a war, soldiers are always ready to fight. War is risky and there are casualties. But who is the enemy?

So many Christians seem to act as if they are in conflict with the world and try all they can to stop other people getting into the church. We are not battling against the world but against Satan and his cohorts. The world, other human beings are innocents and that is how we are to view them. We are to hate the sin they do, but love the sinners that they are, that we are. We, as God's people must never exclude people from hearing about what God has done for them but always remembering that we are in a war with Satan.

But the other thing that Paul says of Epaphroditus is that he is a fellow-worker, a fellow-soldier in Christ. Epaphroditus was working and fighting alongside Paul. There was this closeness, there was this oneness together. They were Meeting The Challenge Together.

I heard the story of a harvest time in a village and it was at the time when the harvest was brought in with sickles, by hand. Early in the morning groups of workers could be seen going out to the field. One groups began in one corner, whilst another group began in another corner and if one took a bird's eye view of the field there are groups of workers dotted all over this field. You even had some groups dividing and one group going off to harvest in a different part of the field.

Sadly this can be a reflection of the church worldwide as we all beaver away at our particular patch. We are not together, but apart, even splitting into several groups at time from one group. This can also be true in one local church as well. Paul has already said that

Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly. It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defence of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. (Philippians 1:14-17 NIV)

Some were fellow-workers, fellow-soldiers, whilst others were workers and soldiers. May we be the former and be fellows-workers and fellow-soldiers together? May we be Meeting The Challenge Together.

It is almost as if Paul is holding Timothy and Epaphroditus up as examples for the church of God at Philippi to follow. An example for what? Let us return to the first part of our reading. Verse 12

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed— not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence— continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labour for nothing. But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. (Philippians 2:12-17 NIV)

Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life (Philippians 2:14-16). Do everything without complaining or arguing, but this does not mean that discussion and debate is precluded. Paul realises that if a task is done with a moaning spirit then that task is usually done badly. Remember the probably situation he is writing to. There are factions and probably one group complaining and moaning about other groups within the church, and Paul is saying that this is wrong and is holding Timothy and Epaphroditus up as to how we should behave.

He also says that we are to do this so that we will shine like stars, we will become pure and blameless because our character will be changed. It may take time and it may mean biting our tongues at times because it is so easy to find the negative in something rather than the positive. And what witness does it give to others if we go around complaining and arguing all the time and a group that moans will not be Meeting The Challenge Together. You only have to read the book of Exodus to read of a people who seemed to love to moan and complain and the negative effect it had on things.

But let us remember Timothy and Epaphroditus, ones who had become family to Paul, ones who had learnt to **do everything without complaining or arguing** and for us to live as family, with our commonalities and our differences being able to Accept, Develop and Belong to Christ, to live together with complaining about things, but to shine like stars, to shine so that others can see Jesus in us.