

Philippians 1:3-11

³I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴Every time I pray for all of you, I always pray with joy, ⁵because of your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶I am convinced of this very thing: that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. ⁷I am equally convinced that it is right for me to think this way about all of you, because I have you in my heart, for both in my chains and in my defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all share in this grace with me. ⁸Yes, God is my witness of how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

⁹And I pray that your love may still increase more and more in knowledge and every insight. ¹⁰This will result in your approval of the things that really matter, so that you will be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Things That Really Matter

I.

You aren't even required to answer the question out loud, but somehow, some way, your answer to the question when you are sitting in a pew at church or watching the church service via livestream at home might be different than your answer much of the rest of the time. Perhaps you formulate your answer, even though it isn't to be given aloud, specifically because of where you are and what you think the pastor might desire your answer to be. But is that *really* your answer?

You see the title screen: "Things that really matter." You know instinctively that there is a question implied: "What *are* the things that really matter?"

Do the priorities you set in life mesh with the answer you come up with internally as you sit here today? I could come up with a list a mile long of things that many consider important, but still miss yours. As long as your priorities aren't illegal or contrary to God's will, there is nothing inherently evil in enjoying them. But are they the things that *really* matter?

II.

"I thank my God every time I remember you" (Philippians 1:3, EHV). One of the things that really mattered to Paul was the people in the congregation at Philippi. Giving thanks for the people in the church is excellent.

"Every time I pray for all of you, I always pray with joy, ⁵because of your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now" (Philippians 1:4-5, EHV). When Paul brought the gospel to them, the people who became the Philippian congregation were overjoyed to receive that message. They immediately began to support the work of ministry and continued that support, no matter what was said of their missionary.

At the time Paul wrote this letter he was "...in my chains and in my defense and confirmation of the gospel" (Philippians 1:7, EHV). Not only was Paul accused of criminal behavior, the message about Jesus itself was on trial. Paul knew that their fellowship in the gospel would never waver or wane. That was something that really matters. That was something to give thanks to God for.

So Paul gave thanks for the people in Philippi when he prayed. He thanked God because they were God's gift to him.

Is that not the way Holy Trinity is to us? This isn't just some recreational sports team or some club or some political organization where we get together because we have some common interests with a few other people. God has brought us together around Jesus. He has given us to each other to support and encourage one another.

Holy Trinity is a great thing. This congregation is something that really matters. Give thanks for your fellow believers in the church because we are God's gifts to one another.

When *I* pray, it is important for me to give thanks for your partnership in the gospel. I can walk down the hallway and see the evidence of the school you have supported for the entire history of this congregation—a school that teaches young minds about Jesus. I give thanks for the Sunday School and Bible classes we hold in which we share our faith in Jesus. I thank you for your “fellowship in the gospel,” as Paul calls it.

That’s a thing that really matters: thanking God for each other in the church; thanking him for giving each of us to one another.

III.

“I am convinced of this very thing: that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6, EHV).

Paul was convinced that the Philippians would be there at the end—at the end of time, when Jesus comes back again. It wasn’t their own abilities or their rugged individualism that had Paul so convinced, it was God the Holy Spirit. Paul was convinced that the Lord Jesus would send the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, to keep them strong in their faith until that last great day when Jesus would return to judge the living and the dead.

Paul was convinced because it was Jesus who *began* this good work in them and Jesus who would *complete* this good work in them. Paul could have such confidence because it was all Jesus.

Paul was convinced. Paul was confident.

Sometimes *we* wonder. While our own Wisconsin Synod has been aggressive in opening new missions, there are other congregations of the WELS that are shrinking. Sometimes two or more congregations merge into one because of lack of members and lack of resources. Attendance figures suffer for many Christian congregations across the country. Entire age groups seem to be missing. Going to sporting events has become more important than worship.

Paul calls for us to be convinced that Jesus will carry us on to completion until that last great day. *Jesus* will do it. He gives us confidence. Why? Because he is the One who *began* this good work in us.

Each week we have the opportunity to come here to this place and have our confidence boosted. There, in the center of the chancel area, stands the baptismal font, reminding us that in baptism we have been made children of God and heirs of heaven. Through the faith the Holy Spirit has given us we are able to approach God confidently in prayer, asking him to give us the forgiveness won for us by Jesus. Twice a month we set the Lord’s table at the top of the stairs. We hear the words in which Jesus promises us the tangible evidence of the forgiveness he bought with his own body and blood: we hear him say to us “take and eat, this is my body take and drink, this is my blood, given and poured out for you.” Each week we participate as a singing church, bringing hymns of praise to the gracious God who has made such confidence possible.

Here we see and hear and participate in the things that really matter, the things that count up to and beyond the very end of time. We are buried with Christ. We are forgiven. The Holy Spirit is living inside us. You and I are the living stones of the temple of our God.

Jesus, “who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6, EHV).

IV.

“And I pray that your love may still increase more and more in knowledge and every insight” (Philippians 1:9, EHV).

Were the Philippians *unloving*? Not at all. Paul prays that their love will increase more and more.

Love, you know, isn’t just a feeling; it isn’t just an emotion. Love is active. Love is a verb. Love means *doing* things.

The Philippians put their love into action for Paul. Lydia was one of the first members of the church in Philippi. She offered her home for Paul and his associates while they were there. When Paul and Silas were in Philippi they were thrown into jail. During the night they sang hymns and prayed. When an earthquake came and opened the doors of the cells, the jailor was ready to commit suicide because he thought the prisoners had escaped. Paul immediately told him not to hurt himself because all the prisoners were still there. That very night the jailor came to faith. His love flowed as he washed Paul's wounds.

The church in Philippi gave money to support Paul over and over again. They gave even more than they could afford, because they knew that Paul's ministry of the gospel really mattered.

What can we do in love? Love does what benefits someone else. Love does what *God* wants done. Later, as Paul closes his letter, he will say: "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if anything is excellent, and if anything is praiseworthy, think about these things" (Philippians 4:8, EHV). Love thinks about these things, and seeks to *do* these things—the commendable, excellent, and praiseworthy things.

What are such things? James once said: "I will show you my faith by my works" (James 2:18, EHV). Paul says in today's reading: "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6, EHV). Consider love increasing more and more in the context of its completion at the day of Christ Jesus—at the Last Day.

After Jesus returns there will be no more tears. Show love by wiping away tears with a comforting word or an embrace, or by praying with and for someone. Offer a safe place for someone to talk and rest.

There will be no more hunger. Love helps those who are in need. We do this for families in our congregation and associated with our congregation through the Care Committee.

There will be no more pain or sickness or death. Love bandages a wound, whether a physical wound or with words to soothe. Love supports research that helps heal diseases. Love provides help and support to families dealing with sickness or death.

There will be no more loneliness. Love visits, or sends a card, or makes a phone call, or even sends a text message.

Ultimately, love wants all people to hear what Jesus has done so that at the last day, the day of Christ Jesus, they will go to this special place where there will be no more tears or crying or pain—the place where everything is perfect and the place where all believers are with Jesus forever.

Love, then, shares this message of the gospel. Share it with your lips by telling others about the Advent of our Lord Jesus—that he came. John the Baptist prepared the way, just as Malachi prophesied he would do. Share it with your prayers for those who have lapsed in their faith, and your prayers for those who have yet to hear, and for the pastors and teachers who work with the gospel full time to present that message. Share it with your offerings to support those who go where you and I cannot go to share this same gospel with people we will only meet when we see them in heaven at the last day.

Fill your life with the things that really matter. Thank God for what he has given you in Christ Jesus and the opportunities he has given you to share Jesus. When you do that, all the other priorities in life will fall into their proper order. God bless your focus on things that really matter. Amen.