

**St. Paul Lutheran Church
Grant Park, Illinois
The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost, September 30, 2018
Philippians 1:12-18a**

Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 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 defense 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. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

Do you know anyone who has an easy time no matter what they do? Maybe you've studied and prepared all night for a test. You're nervous about it and unsure of how you will do. Your classmate comes in and sits down, but they don't seem nervous. You say, "I'm a nervous wreck about this test. I studied all night last night for it and I'm still not sure I'm ready. How long did you study?" Your classmate simply replies, "About five minutes. It was easy." Guess what? Your classmate gets an A on the test.

We can see this happen in different things. We take our car to the mechanic and he instantly tells us what is wrong. We can go to a general doctor, but they don't know what is wrong and so we go to a specialist and it takes less than an hour to nail down our ailment we couldn't solve for weeks. You ever get a little bit jealous when this happens? Do you ever wish you could look at something and know what was wrong or study it for five minutes and ace the test?

I am willing to bet, if you understand the jealousy and envy which can come when someone is easily able to do something we work hard to do, that you will understand the jealousy and envy the Christians Paul writes about today were experiencing. Paul was in prison in Rome and he was in prison because he was sharing the good news about Jesus and what he had done for us. He had been thrown into prison a few years earlier in Jerusalem, made his appeal to Caesar and now was waiting for his trial in Rome.

The believers in Philippi knew Paul was in prison and they were anxious to hear about how he was doing because they loved and cared about him. They sent a man named Epaphroditus to see how Paul was doing and how he could assist Paul because they were concerned about what Paul's imprisonment meant for the gospel and its cause. Paul gives them a positive and somewhat miraculous report about it.

"Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ." How did everyone know Paul was in prison for Jesus? Acts tells us, "For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ."

Paul was in prison, but it was plain and evident to all the people around him the only reason he was in prison was because he was sharing the message of Jesus Christ and him crucified for the sins of the entire world. Paul was under house arrest at this time and would have a guard stationed at his house every minute of every day. He would be able to talk to these men and share the good news of Jesus with them.

They passed it along to the others who were part of their unit. This guard wasn't any old guard. It was Caesar's elite guard, made up of some of the best soldiers Rome could offer. Not only did the soldiers know Paul was in prison because of Jesus, but many people in Rome did too. The book of Acts also tells us, **"When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him. Three days later he called together the leaders of the Jews."**

"The Jews replied, 'We want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect.' They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. From morning till evening he explained and declared to

them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe.”

History tells us that a number of the Jewish synagogues in Rome converted to Christianity and Paul's imprisonment and subsequent witness seems to be one big reason for this conversion. Could you imagine what one of those previous Christians would have felt like? Why some jealousy might creep in? It seems like Paul shows up and the whole city is talking about him and it is all good news, but compare it to the previous few years when the religion of Christianity is being spoken against.

How would you feel? Would you feel like God had forgotten you? Like he didn't love you because he blessed someone else more than you? What if we fast forward 2,000 years? How would we feel if someone else would have huge success and a favorable opinion over and against us? Imagine a brand new Wisconsin Synod church was built in the area. We don't think they will have much success because we've been working and reaching out the community and we seem to be shrinking and dying.

But it doesn't deter the new church from forming and guess what happens? Those people we've been reaching out to, the straying from our congregations, the unbelievers who have rejected our witness time and again? They start coming to this new church and it starts to flourish and prosper in a way we could only dream about. How would we feel? What would we think? One possible reaction is to become jealous. It seems so easy for them. It just isn't fair. Why aren't they struggling like we are?

We could renew our efforts and share the gospel with the lost in order to keep up with the new church. We could become aggressive and put out the full out media blitz and canvass in the area to promote our church. We could do all we can to grow and increase our church so we don't look bad compared to the thriving church down the road. But where have we placed our trust? Where have we placed our confidence? Have we placed it in the message or the messengers?

If our sole objective is to grow our church so it doesn't look bad it means we have placed our confidence in the messengers of the gospel rather than the message of the gospel. This is sin because it means we have placed our confidence in ourselves rather than trust in the promises of God that he will grow his gospel. What happens if we fail when we trust in ourselves? We'll fall into despair. What if we succeed? We'll become smug and self-assured, convinced we don't need God to survive and thrive.

But what if our goal is to grow our church by putting our confidence in the message of the gospel? What will happen then? **“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 defense 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.”**

“But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.” We'll become like Paul. We'll know and understand that whenever Christ is taught in his truth and purity it means his kingdom is growing. It means he is granting success to it. But why would Jesus do it this way? Why would he make the growth of his kingdom dependent on his message?

Because it will drive us back to him again and again to be reminded about how our salvation is a gift to us in the first place. Jesus has won it for us. He didn't buy it with gold or silver, but with his holy precious blood and innocent suffering and death. He did this so we might be able to live with him and for him in his kingdom and be able to serve him with our lives. He didn't do this to boost his own ego. He did this because he loves us.

The message we share about Jesus' love and forgiveness is two sided. The first side is obvious because it is the side which the Holy Spirit will use to create faith in unbeliever's hearts, but the second side might not be as obvious. When we use the message of Christ it will remind us about his love for us. If we fail with our witness the message of Christ will focus us on the fact that he still loves us even though we feel like a failure. If we have success it will lead us to rejoice others know the love we already know.

The other point it will help us realize is that sharing the good news of Jesus isn't a competition of who can win more souls for the kingdom, but a chance to win souls for the kingdom. Paul's attitude and encouragement for us to focus on Christ will help us realize this and shape our attitude to be like Paul's when he says, **"But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice."**

Should we be jealous when we see a church in our area which preaches the truth of Jesus growing with ease? Hardly. We should rejoice. Rejoice because the truth of the gospel is spreading. Rejoice because more and more people are learning the good news. Rejoice because Christ is being preached because we don't know what God has in store for us and our church. Maybe it is what we expect. Maybe it is something different, but Christ has been preached and for this reason we rejoice. Amen.