

Pastor T.C. Arnold  
22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Trinity  
Philippians 1:3-11  
October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2013

Hallmark could really use a guy like St. Paul. He could live right here in Kansas City and use his word-smith skills to create elegant, encouraging and comforting cards – the kind you get that have a deep personal and warm meaning. For example, as Paul writes to the Church at Philippi, *“I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace...”* And also, *“I yearn for you with all the affection of Christ Jesus.”* Hallmark Card kind of language.

Pat Mitchell of our Parish-family, who is a retired editor and writer for Hallmark, once told me that the company would send writers on annual retreats to a Hallmark –owned farm near Kearney in order to help with creative inspiration for writing. Perhaps a different setting, other than an office, would help with the creative writing processes. Paul’s setting for inspiration was a bit different.

Paul was most likely a prisoner in Rome when he wrote these words – guided by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, of course, to the faithful at Philippi. Paul’s setting of inspiration was less than ideal – a prisoner – but yet a thankful and joyful prisoner. *“I thank my God in all my remembrance of you always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your **“partnership”** in the gospel from the first day until now.”* Why was Paul thankful with joy while in prison? The reason, *“because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day...”*

Thankfulness and joy may come from all sorts of different places for you and me. However, the reason Paul had joy was because of this one little word that has such a rich and important meaning... **“Koinonia.”** The English Standard Version translation uses the word “Partnership” for koinonia. But that might not be the best way for us to understand that word.

Koinonia means “fellowship.” In other words, it’s a participation together in the things we have in common – the common things – not only on earth but also in heaven. For example, this same word, Koinonia is used in 1 Corinthians 10:16 when Paul talks about “Fellowship” at the Lord’s Supper. He says, *“The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a “Koinonia” in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a “Koinonia” in the body of Christ?”* The Lord’s Supper is both an earthly and heavenly fellowship. We have unity at the table and with Christ at the Holy meal He gave us for the forgiveness of all of our sins.

Okay, so now that we have Paul writing his Hallmark card of thankfulness and joy taken care of... now that we know why Paul is thankful and joyful... let’s ask the question that means the most to all of us, “So what?” What does all this mean for us today? What does this mean for my life, for a family who brings a child to the waters of Holy Baptism today, with my kids driving me crazy, with the mess that’s going on at work, with confusion I have regarding the government and everything else that is going on at this game we call, “life.”

Well, what all of this means for us, is the same as why Paul wrote these Hallmark words to the Philippians. The joy and thanksgiving was because of fellowship. The “so what for me” is the joy and thanksgiving that we have in fellowship – that common thing – together... even when we get bad news, can’t catch a break, and when life seems to be handing us the worst – like for Paul who was in chains. It’s good to have something together – a faith, these gifts, these fellow-saints who make up the body of Christ who confess, “*One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*” Around you today are fellow sufferers who were never meant to go through this life alone – and you are never alone.

The “so what” for us is a reminder that we get the joy and thanksgiving of koinonia – of fellowship – wrong when we don’t meet together under the banner of the gift of faith. We get fellowship wrong when we think that fellowship is just talking to one another. We get it wrong when we give up on the real fellowship in faith, in life, in worship – in the connection with those who are sitting next to you and then also with your Lord. Koinonia, the kind that Paul talks about, includes all aspects of life. This Koinonia is important because the real joy that Paul talks about doesn’t come from what we have or what we can buy. Often times we are fooled to think so and then our worship, our care, our hearts go towards those things. They become what we desire to “partner” with. The result of this kind of partnership is disappointment – because these things don’t last,

When St. Paul tells the Philippians, “*It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment...*” he is talking about that love in fellowship – in the things on earth and the things in heaven. Fellowship, with love and discernment, of the things of this world and the things above – together. Beloved, let’s be together. Together in love – that’s what God does to us and for us. He brings us to Himself – us together – in the faith. And what better place to gather – to be brought – than this place?

A child brought by Christ together at the font of Holy Baptism. His/her parents brought him/her. For what reason? To make him/her different – or unique? No, to bring into the fellowship – the partnership – the communion of the saints that God gathers. The partnership in the Gospel is our blessed joy even with little children. Our partnership and fellowship started on a hill outside of Jerusalem.

You see, it wasn’t a sappy Hallmark card of a story. Joy and thanksgiving are found in our bleeding Jesus. Paul’s Thanksgiving, prayer and joy for the Philippians rested in Jesus – not a sentimental feeling. Joy for heaven is found in a suffering Jesus. Joy for life together is grounded in the one who paid for it all. Joy for life together shows brightly on Easter with the resurrection because that joyful day of life is our joyful life that never ends. Joy and thanksgiving still show up when God’s people come together in the unity of faith – like in this place today. That’s why there is joy – even when one is in prison. That’s why there is joy – in the midst of our struggles. Joy, life and fellowship are gifts in faith – and that fellowship has a blessed end. Feelings come and go. But koinonia in the Gospel endure. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.