

1 From Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus.

To all those in Philippi who are God's people in Christ Jesus, along with your supervisors and servants.

2 May the grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

3 I thank my God every time I mention you in my prayers. 4 I'm thankful for all of you every time I pray, and it's always a prayer full of joy. 5 I'm glad because of the way you have been my partners in the ministry of the gospel from the time you first believed it until now. 6 I'm sure about this: the one who started a good work in you will stay with you to complete the job by the day of Christ Jesus. 7 I have good reason to think this way about all of you because I keep you in my heart. You are all my partners in God's grace, both during my time in prison and in the defense and support of the gospel. 8 God is my witness that I feel affection for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus.

9 This is my prayer: that your love might become even more and more rich with knowledge and all kinds of insight. 10 I pray this so that you will be able to decide what really matters and so you will be sincere and blameless on the day of Christ. 11 I pray that you will then be filled with the fruit of righteousness, which comes from Jesus Christ, in order to give glory and praise to God.

12 Brothers and sisters, I want you to know that the things that have happened to me have actually advanced the gospel. 13 The whole Praetorian Guard and everyone else knows that I'm in prison for Christ. 14 Most of the brothers and sisters have had more confidence through the Lord to speak the word boldly and bravely because of my jail time. 15 Some certainly preach Christ with jealous and competitive motives, but others preach with good motives. 16 They are motivated by love, because they know that I'm put here to give a defense of the gospel; 17 the others preach Christ because of their selfish ambition. They are insincere, hoping to cause me more pain while I'm in prison.

18 What do I think about this? Just this: since Christ is proclaimed in every possible way, whether from dishonest or true motives, I'm glad and I'll continue to be glad.

- **Common English Bible**

For the past few weeks, we've been catching glimpses of the apostle Paul at distinctly different moments in his Christian ministry. For the next few weeks we'll be reflecting on a letter from

Please note: actual sermon content may vary from this manuscript at time of delivery.

his own hand, a letter written from prison... prison exactly where and exactly when we're not sure; Paul spent a lot of time in prison. We know from a few weeks ago that he even spent time in prison in Philippi, the community to whom he is now writing. The glimpse I'm catching of Paul this week, though, from these first verses of the letter to the Philippians, is of his prayer life. It's pretty rare to get a glimpse into someone's prayer life. The daily conversations we have with God are usually deeply personal and private and not visible to those around us.

Even though many of you have heard me pray publicly and have experienced or will experience me praying out loud with you privately, I have a personal prayer life that unfolds in my journal and in my bed and on my knees or behind my steering wheel that is not on display. I may tell you I'm praying for you, but how do you know, really, that I am?

Well, I am. I seek to spend some time every day in focused prayer. Some days the prayers are groggy and interwoven with dream, some days they are rushed or truncated, steering wheel days... some days more full... but every day I pray. And I always begin, as Paul appears to have also done, with gratitude. Paul tells the Philippians repeatedly how much gratitude he has in his heart for them, and how much joy fills his heart when he remembers them in prayer. Perhaps my testimonies to my love for you at the start of worship most weeks has helped you to glimpse the depth of my gratitude to and for you, but I don't think you know how often gratitude for you infuses my prayers. I give thanks almost daily for the call you extended to me five years ago. And one of my most frequent prayers of gratitude is "Thank you for giving me such marvelous partners in ministry." And often I name you one by one before God... lifting up the particular blessing that each of you contributes to the marvelous whole that is St. Andrew's.

This service is a beautiful testimony to partnership in ministry. Your deacons, a board of elected caregiving servants, have yearned to properly honor and remember and celebrate all the lives lost these past few years when it has been so hard to have proper memorial services and celebrations of life. They have been dreaming and planning for months. And so we are gathered today remembering, grieving, and giving thanks for the partners in ministry we've lost and we have living partners in ministry to thank for this. I may be a solo pastor, but I am

not alone in my ministry. Clearly if I can lead you from home today. You are my partners and you are fabulous partners.

Did you notice the address of Paul's letter? "To all those in Philippi who are God's people in Christ Jesus, along with your supervisors and servants." The Greek translated supervisors and servants is more literally bishops and deacons. The words point to the formal leadership of the early church in Philippi. The letter is addressed to the whole church, their leaders included, but not prioritized. And therefore the prayers of thanksgiving and joy are for the whole community of believers, not just their leaders. So when Paul says he's glad for the ways they've been his partners in ministry since first they believed... he's talking to all of them, not just those identified as leaders.

And I'm talking to all of you. Just as I pray in gratitude for all of you. And indeed my gratitude extends to the all the saints of St. A's living and dead, for the vitality of our ministry today is a legacy of all the investments poured into us by all the partners in ministry who have called St. A's home. We rejoice that the good work God has started in us, in large part through the gifts and service of those lives we celebrate today, continues and will be completed by the grace of God through partnership in ministry.

So friends, look around... please... soak in all your beautiful partners in ministry... and look in on your own heart... and see the gifts that God has uniquely given you that allow you to be a partner too... and hold close your memories of those you have loved and lost and seek to learn from them in all your days... and know that I am praying for you, every day, with immense gratitude for you... and praying as well that the highest good be done in and through you... this is just my way of praying as Paul did that love, insight, understanding, wisdom in discernment, and the fruits of righteousness will abound in this fellowship. And I have confidence because I give you and your ministry to God daily... and I trust that you give me and my ministry to God daily too... and what God has started, God will complete. So let us join Paul in rejoicing, whatever our immediate circumstances may be.