

WELCOME 15th October 2023 – 20th Sunday after Pentecost '23 A

Philippians 3:1-21

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! Along with your worship order you have in your hands **Growing Praise** inserts & **Bible Study Qs** that are able to lead you deeper into God's word/work in your life, & help you share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom Bible Study Catch-ups on Friday @ 1p.m.** Link will be on website...Tuesday...Wednesday...

As we move into this week... Life is a series of trade-off's You **can't** have it all. Every day we make choices. Choosing "this" thing means we choose to **not** have "that" thing. We know that.

You can't have all the advantages of married life **AND** be single. You can't be "the boss" **AND** free of responsibility. You can't have children **AND** lots of free time for yourself/career. Some things just don't go together. Life is a series of mutually exclusive trade-offs, choices, & pursuits...**AND**...**Our** path in life is determined by those choices... by what we value most highly & pursue most deliberately.

From his Roman jail cell, Paul shares how his highest value & most deliberate pursuit lead to joy...eternal joy...

*"...everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so I could gain Christ & become one with him...Forgetting the past & looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race & receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling **us**."*

Eternal joy results from one thing: relentlessly pursuing Christ to live in him. No other value, pursuit, priority or choice yields the gift only Christ gives freely.

Let's pray...and then explore & experience that together...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Heavenly Father your word is always a word that lasts forever & leads to you. Penetrate our hearts with your word today. Give us confidence that in you we find all things good & all things moving toward your glory, your love & your life with us forever...let your word made flesh be the one thing our hearts desire...Jesus Christ our Lord...Amen.

Let's hear God's word...

FAITH CHAT:

1. What is something you have done that you are proud of & which brings you joy to remember? "I did that!" "I. Did. That!"
2. If you were to have to "downsize" your home/lifestyle...What "old treasure" would be hardest for you to throw away? "My spouse" is an incorrect answer!

20 PENTECOST '23 A – THE PANDEMIC OF JOY: ETERNAL JOY

Back in the mid-'90's I was part of a PD workshop for people in "helping professions:" Social workers, pastors, school counsellors, chaplains...professional "helpers." One session addressed long-term chronic circumstances. The facilitator asked which would challenge a family system the most? --- bring most stress to bear, greatest difficulty over the long-haul, hardest to live/deal w/ We talked through a range of illnesses & conditions...addictions, mental health afflictions, MD, MS, MN, cancer, chronic pain disorders...one lady finally held up her hand & in barely a whisper said, "Dementia or Alzheimer's" The room went absolutely silent...the long forgetting of who you are, who the people around you are & what they mean, losing any sense of self & your place in the world & all of the little or big things that make your life yours...unique...special. *We didn't know then just how bad*

We hate to forget & go to great lengths to remember. B-days, Annivs, days of note...we just did that here back in June...We collect photos & memorabilia of special times, people, events...specifically to help us remember. Sometimes we remember in unusual ways...a smell or sound & we're "back there" almost in real time. When someone forgets our name it feels like it's us who've been forgotten...we hate that.

About 300X the Bible commands memory/remembrance from God's people of what God has done in their lives & how their very existence is dependent on God's hand intervening in their world for their good. "Watch out! Be careful to never forget what you yourself have seen. Do not let these memories escape from your mind as long as you live! Be sure to pass them on to your children & grandchildren." – Dt 4:9 Generation to generation we are to remember...

So imagine Paul...saturated in the history of God's people...trained from childhood in remembering not only the sacred texts of Scripture (our OT) but also the teaching of rabbis/scholars...hundreds & hundreds of years of remembering...memories of God's faithfulness & his peoples' sins & God's restoring grace...and then...then he meets Jesus & declares: *I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ & become one with him.* "I deliberately set aside as garbage everything I once held precious for the sake of Jesus & being drawn into him."

I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past & looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race & receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. "I wipe from my mind everything else so I can concentrate on & pursue only what Jesus Christ has accomplished for us."

For a guy who's been forged in the fire of "never forget" to suddenly count his precious treasure of memories as things to be discarded as rubbish & deliberately forgotten...I can't even entertain that w/o feeling the weight of what Paul says & it's been churning in me for a while now...I think it's too easy to say he's throwing away his social & spiritual résumé. I know...he says he's experienced the Right Ritual, he's the Right Race, he comes from the Right Tribe/Family, he practices the Right Religion, he holds the Right Occupation, he lives the Right Zeal, & demonstrates the Right Morality...And his identity his place in the world his status are all wrapped up in that...But I believe Paul's leading us deeper than that.

Let's take this a step at a time...*I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done.* The death/rez of Jesus Christ has set Paul's world on a new axis...what is of highest value now is what Christ has given that nothing else can...what cannot be done by keeping the law (by any measure of his spiritual/social pedigree) is fully accomplished in Christ...*Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. – Rom 5:1* (Made right in God's sight)...*peace => all things are in proper order/as should be* So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. – Rom 8:1 Not threatened w/ facing an angry God...no score to keep or settle...we're friends

Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new creation. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! – 2 Cor 5:17 What I was intended to be all along...in Christ I am And because that is true...my life now is aimed at demonstrating Christ's greatness & his rule over all things through the whole of my life...my life now is lived to fully reveal in every aspect of my daily doings the ONE PERSON who satisfies my deepest longings & exceeds my highest hopes...Jesus. *My life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God. – Acts 20:24* My life is at its fullest when I share w/ others the life-transforming joy & greatness of Jesus crucified/risen/ruling

But he doesn't stop there...*For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ & become one with him.* Jesus once asked, "What does it profit someone to gain the whole world but forfeit their soul?" What good is it to you if you have every earthly wish-dream in triplicate but die apart from God? Christ has shifted the goalposts for Paul...the only pursuit worthy of his life is life in Christ in all times...demonstrating Christ's greatness everywhere he is, every day he lives. But more than that...Not only have the goalposts shifted, so has the timeline...*I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past & looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race & receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.*

Paul suddenly understands we were never...no not ever meant for this world only. The horizon for life in relationship w/ the Father was never intended to end "dust you are & to dust you shall return." Only in Christ do we see our lives reaching that eternal horizon...And everything of this world that is only for this world is in fact: garbage. Our achievements: garbage. Our accumulations: garbage. Our acquisitions/garbage. Anything that exalts me – that glorifies me – that makes much of me – garbage. John says it as well: *Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, & pride in our achievements & possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world. And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever.* – 1 Jn 2:15-17 I got in trouble once for saying human accolades were, for the follower of Jesus, akin to the stuff you wiped off your boots when you came in from the shearing shed. True.

I said something like this out at the Xn College worship the other morning...we dare not make this world the focus of our highest hopes & deepest dreams our best efforts & most fervent strivings...or we lose them all at the grave. God's agenda is so much larger than my worldly honours & he sends the Holy Spirit to make sure I'm engaged in his eternal agenda not any dying to dust earthly one.

"...everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so I could gain Christ & become one with him...Forgetting the past & looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race & receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us."

The story is the same for each of us...Our path in life is determined by our choices; by what we value most highly & pursue most deliberately. As followers of Jesus that for us is to be demonstrating Christ's greatness & his rule over all things through the whole of our lives...our lives are now to be lived to fully reveal in every aspect of our daily doings the *ONE PERSON* who satisfies our deepest longings & exceeds our highest hopes...

Eternal joy results from one thing: relentlessly pursuing Christ to live in him; demonstrating Christ's greatness everywhere we are, every day we live.

TAKE IT HOME – As you leave today, be specific & share w/ your neighbour...

What could you "give up" this week to give Christ more control over your decisions & your doings?

How do you think that will change you?

Let's pray with that in mind...

Lord Jesus you gave your life so we could have life with you now and forever in the Father's presence. By your Spirit build our trust in your promise. Grow our understanding of your Word. Strengthen our witness to you. We pray in your Name... Amen