



Gifts of Grace

Toward Financial Wellbeing

Gifts of Grace Text Study

Philippians 2:1-13

Gifts of Grace is the initiative from the Synod and the Lilly Foundation Inc. to create a culture of healthy, vital, and sustainable ministry throughout the congregations of the synod. If you are interested in speaking about Gifts of Grace in your sermon on September 27 we have prepared some potential preaching points from which you can build. The text studied is the 2nd Reading from the RCL. This tool is laid out by preaching points with research listed below. The points selected are: building Christ centered community, generosity, and humility. All of these relate to Gifts of Grace.

Building Christ centered community

“Paul has also shifted to another issue, the need to shore up unity of purpose and self-sacrificing love in a community under pressure. Paul needs to bring out the liturgical fire power in support of his definition in v. 4 of what it means for Christians to share a common purpose and to treat one another with love and compassion: each of them should care not for their own interests but for the interests of others.”¹

“Many Christians imagine Paul as a distant, somewhat austere, figure, yet the ties of love and concern that are so evident in his correspondence with the Philippians show a different side to the Apostle. Jail, local opposition, squabbles between valued coworkers, illness, separation—so much to be anxious about. And yet, Paul says, ‘Rejoice Give thanks! Discern God’s hand in the situation as you see the gospel message being spread.’”²

(2:1) “It is because Christians are “in Christ” that they are united to him and to one another and are able to share his mind and strength. It is this union that is the source of the “encouragement” that provides, in turn the “consolation/comfort” of love “sharing in/fellowship with the Spirit,” “compassion/tenderness and sympathy/compassion.” Paul does not specify whose love he has in mind; no doubt Christ’s love for us comes first, but he may well be thinking also of Christian’s love for Christ and for one another. Similarly, although the Spirit is the origin of fellowship, Paul’s phrase probably refers also to our participation in the life and work of the Spirit and the fellowship with other Christians that the Spirit creates.”³

“The underlying exhortation [behave in such a way as will make (his) love complete] is to ‘be what you are,’ to live ‘in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.’ they are to be ‘of the same mind...’ the Christian community must share a common attitude, and what that attitude is will be spelled out in 5-11. The command to ‘be of the same mind’ is amplified by the next three phrases: have the same love, be ‘in full accord,’ and think or feel one thing.”⁴

1 Perkins, P. Quarterly Review 22(2, 2002)199-207. Finding Joy in the Lord. 2002. 203

2 Perkins, P. Quarterly Review 22(2, 2002)199-207. Finding Joy in the Lord. 2002. 207

3 Harrelson, Walter. 2003. New Interpreter’s Study Bible. Volume X. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. 132

4 Harrelson, Walter. 2003. New Interpreter’s Study Bible. Volume X. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. 132

5: "The Philippians are urged to have in themselves the disposition that Christ showed. It has been argued, however, that Paul's appeal in these verses is not to the example of the earthly Jesus, but to the events of the saving kerygma. In other words, Paul is not urging the Philippians to imitate Christ, but to be what they already are, 'in him,' to think among themselves what they think 'in Christ.' ...we should understand Paul's command to mean 'show among yourselves the attitude that arises from the fact that you are in Christ.'"5

"To give someone a name is to give him or her status and power. The name bestowed on Jesus here is 'the name above every name,' which is clearly the name of God... the name that is given to Christ at his exaltation cannot be the name Jesus, for that is the name he has already borne throughout his human life... When the name Jesus is mentioned, then all creation should acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord. In the Roman city of Philippi, where the cult of the emperor was so important, the proclamation of Jesus as Lord would be seen as a challenge to the political loyalties. But the pattern of behavior that Paul had placed before the Philippians would have been just as much a challenge to the whole Roman social ethos."6

12: "The fact that the Philippians are urged to work out their own salvation does not conflict with the Pauline insistence that salvation is the work of God alone... The Philippians are to complete what God has done by living it out in their own lives. But this is not simply an individual matter. Paul has already urged the Philippians to avoid selfish concern for their own interests. The "your" is plural in Greek, and the life that is to be lived is that lived in the community of believers. Paul's words, like those of Moses [in Deuteronomy] are addressed to the people of God, not to a collection of individuals."7

"What are the implications of these verses for Christian living? ...Because this passage upsets our normal assumption about what God is like, it has a radical effect on our understanding of what God expects from us. Instinctive human attitudes are turned on their heads. Those who confess Jesus as Lord should not be looking for status or power, nor should they be acting from selfish ambition or conceit. Rather they should be humbly considering others better than themselves. And because they are concerned with the interests of others, they will be of one mind and one purpose, having the same love as of one accord."8

"Christian obedience does not mean living in accordance with a set of rules; rather it means responding in the appropriate way to the self-giving love of God. The vision that Paul provides us with is, in fact, far more valuable than any set of rules. Christians in the modern world are faced with innumerable ethical dilemmas, which multiply each year... We cannot expect to find ready-made answers to these modern-day questions in the bible... Although Paul may not have given us precise guidelines about what to do in particular situations, he has, though this section, given us very significant hints. The basis for all our actions is our life in Christ. Unity is a must for those who are one in Christ."9

5 Harrelson, Walter. 2003. *New Interpreter's Study Bible*. Volume X. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. 139

6 Harrelson, Walter. 2003. *New Interpreter's Study Bible*. Volume X. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. 143

7 Harrelson, Walter. 2003. *New Interpreter's Study Bible*. Volume X. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. 144

8 Harrelson, Walter. 2003. *New Interpreter's Study Bible*. Volume X. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. 148

9 Harrelson, Walter. 2003. *New Interpreter's Study Bible*. Volume X. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. 149

Generosity

“The characteristic note of Paul’s letter to the Philippians is above all that of joy - a remarkable feature in view of the fact that this letter was written in prison, where its author was held under a capital charge!”¹⁰

“If we wish to attempt to understand the passage (2:6-11) in its historical context, we need to remember that Paul wrote what he did here, not in order to deal with the issues of Christ’s divinity and humanity that so exercised the Church Fathers in the fourth and fifth centuries, but to spell out the way in which those who are in Christ ought to live. The passage is, indeed, an important christological statement - but its importance lies not only in what it says about Christ, but also in the implications for the lives of those who acknowledge Christ as Lord. It is Paul’s insight into the relevance of divinity (who and what God is and does) to true humanity (who and what men and women should be and do) - of what we term “theology” to “ethics” - that makes this letter of great and lasting theological significance.”¹¹

(2:1) “Paul’s appeal is based on the ‘encouragement’ the Philippians possess ‘in Christ.’ Encouragement can mean both comfort and exhortation; commentators are divided as to which meaning it has here, but it is perhaps unnecessary to choose. The English word encouragement conveys both senses, and the noun is probably used here to denote the power that enables the Philippians to do the things listed in 2-4. In Christ believers find both comfort and strength.”¹²

“Verse 4 provides a parallel contrast between concern for one’s own interest and concern for the interests of others... What are the interests with which Christians are concerned? Paul does not specify. Indeed, there is no noun in the Greek, merely the definite article, followed by the words ‘your own’ and ‘of others.’ Perhaps he is being intentionally vague; the phrase could refer to possessions, to rights, to spiritual gifts, or to points of view.”¹³

10 Harrelson, Walter. 2003. *New Interpreter’s Study Bible*. Volume X. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. 107

11 Harrelson, Walter. 2003. *New Interpreter’s Study Bible*. Volume X. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. 111-112

12 Harrelson, Walter. 2003. *New Interpreter’s Study Bible*. Volume X. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. 132

13 Harrelson, Walter. 2003. *New Interpreter’s Study Bible*. Volume X. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. 133

Humility

“Just as Paul himself decided for the Philippians’ needs against his own preference (1:23-26), so all Christians must be ready to put the needs of others ahead of their own. An ancient audience, well schooled in a honor-shame culture, was no happier to hear this definition of humility (sounds more like ‘humiliation’!) than would modern Americans brought up on messages of self-help, self-esteem, and self-assertion—all decidedly not self-emptying.”¹⁴

“Jesus humbled himself even to the point of death. God’s response was to bestow God’s own name and cosmic authority on this truly righteous one. On either reading, the hymn is a stunning model for Christians who must constantly resist the false standards of power and greatness held up by the culture in which they live. For those Christians who are the poor, dishonored, and humiliated ones in the world, the imagery has a different meaning. Jesus/God has entered into their suffering.”¹⁵

“The fact that God is at work is the basis for Paul’s confidence that his own presence or absence makes no difference to the Philippians’ obedience.”¹⁶

“God is revealed through what God does, and here we find that God is revealed through what Christ does. Having been told that Christ is “in the form of God,” we find our attention immediately focused on what he is in his self-emptying, in his self humiliation, and in his obedience, even to the point of death. And because he is in the form of God, his actions reveal not simply his own character or nature, but what God is like as well... To acknowledge this Jesus as universal Lord is to accept as Lord the humble, obedient figure on the cross. And since divine being is revealed in divine action, we begin to understand why theology and ethics are inseparable. The basic ethical exhortation is to be like God which means, in effect, to behave like God. These few verses thus form one of the most profound statements in the Pauline corpus about the nature of God.”¹⁷

“Today we hear of Christ himself taking the form of a slave, humbling himself even to the point of death by crucifixion -- the execution reserved for slaves and traitors in the Roman Empire. Paradoxically, our liberation comes from Christ's voluntary bondage, which is his entry into our bondage. This movement by Christ is the heartbeat of the exhortation that begins and ends today's passage. If we want to become like Christ, we begin by hearing how Christ became like us, and continues to come among us. Then, and only then, are we ready to hear about ‘the imitation of Christ.’”¹⁸

“Finally, the drama of salvation enacted by Christ (2:6-11) and embedded in exhortations to act in ways that mirror Christ's humiliation, service and obedience (2:1-5, 12-13), is a kind of street theater that involves the audience in the action. This is not a television show or a movie; it is not virtual reality; it is God's action in the flesh, invading our worlds, catching us up into the saving work of God, making us also participants, actors in the drama. No longer mere spectators, we are part of the ‘spectacle’ of God (1 Corinthians 4:9).”¹⁹

14 Perkins, P. Quarterly Review 22(2, 2002)199-207. Finding Joy in the Lord. 2002. 203

15 Perkins, P. Quarterly Review 22(2, 2002)199-207. Finding Joy in the Lord. 2002. 204

16 Harrelson, Walter. 2003. New Interpreter’s Study Bible. Volume X. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. 145

17 Harrelson, Walter. 2003. New Interpreter’s Study Bible. Volume X. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. 147

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19 Eastman, Susan. Philippians 2:1-13 Commentary. Working Preacher September 25 2011

Background

“Philippi had originally flourished because of gold mines nearby, but these had been worked out long before the first century CE, and the city was important mainly as an agricultural center, being situated on the edge of the fertile plain where grain and wine were produced... The city had come under Roman rule in the second century BCE and after Antony and Octavian defeated Brutus and Cassius at the battles of Philippi in 42 BCE it had been refounded as a Roman colony and many Italians had been brought in and settled.”²⁰

(3-4) “We are accustomed to thinking of humility as a virtue, but it was not considered to be such in the Greek world, where it was regarded as servility. Paul’s converts might well have been surprised to find him urging them to behave with humility, but the reason will be made clear in v 8.”²¹

²⁰ Harrelson, Walter. 2003. *New Interpreter’s Study Bible*. Volume X. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. 107

²¹ Harrelson, Walter. 2003. *New Interpreter’s Study Bible*. Volume X. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. 133



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