

12-27-2020 SERMON CCI Philippians 1: 3-11 This is My Prayer

This is my last Sunday worship with you, Community Church of Issaquah. Writing this last sermon has been hard. Saying good-bye to people we love is hard. But it is time, and I leave you in good hands with Pastor John Armagost as your Spiritual Care Pastor.

Our scripture reading from Philippians chapter 1 comes from the Apostle Paul, who had started the church in Philippi on one of his missionary journeys. He loved the Philippian believers and they loved Paul. Paul and the church had partnered together to spread the good news of Jesus. Paul wrote these words while he was in prison; Paul never saw the Philippian believers again after he wrote these words. So they could have been his last words to them. Which makes them good last words for me to share with you.

Paul thanked God every time he remembered the Philippian believers because of the work they had done together and their faithfulness after he left them to continue his missionary journey. Friends, I thank God for you today. I thank God for your faith that has given you a resilience in the face of very real challenges. You weathered the sale of your beloved building, and a rental space became your spiritual home where you continued to worship and study God's Word together, and serve Issaquah together. By faith, you have weathered the deaths of dear friends and members, internal conflicts, having to say good-bye to people who have moved away, and now all the changes that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought. This July, you said good-bye to the rental space because you chose to be fiscally responsible during the pandemic when you couldn't gather in person. It took courage and faith. I am proud of the ways you learned to stay connected and in ministry from a distance- you didn't get lazy and fade away, you learned how to keep studying and worshipping and meeting on Facebook and ZOOM. We have laughed together at our technology mishaps, haven't we? Some of you even learned to provide a music ministry by phone to those stuck in their homes. Whoever said you can't teach an old dog new tricks had never met this church

I thank God for the growth in faith and knowledge I have seen in those who are a part of Adult Forum this past year- your desire to apply God's

Word to your own lives, your willingness to explore hard questions where there are no easy answers, your honesty to stretch and share your own insights have made our times together so rich. We truly learned together.

I also thank God for the ways we have partnered together to serve the homeless and those in need. Your eagerness to feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, welcome strangers, visit the sick and lonely, free prisoners in Jesus' name has demonstrated your sincere love of Christ. Every time you were invited to meet a challenging offering or gift goal you exceeded it- whether it was supplies for Tent City 4, money to support counseling services for those who lost everything in the Paradise, CA, fires, giving to the food bank, giving coats for the men at the Union Gospel Mission, or last year's Christmas gifts for a family- you exceeded the goals. I thank God for your faithful generosity. I am confident with Paul that "he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Don't grow weary in well-doing. The work of Christmas still needs to be done.

I want to focus on verses 9-10. *"And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ."* Friends, this is my prayer as I finish my time of ministry among you. I pray that the love I have seen in you and experienced from you myself will keep on growing. Like Paul, I pray that your love will abound more and more. The word abound pictures something overflowing its container. It's like filling your glass with water from the kitchen faucet and the water just keeps coming and keeps coming until it has overflowed all over the kitchen. Overflowing water all over the kitchen is a mess, but overflowing love of God and loving your neighbors as yourselves, even when it is messy, it is the grace the world needs to see. I pray that your love will overflow into this community in obvious actions and words. That you won't let your love and energy become ingrown focused on those who are already part of you. Don't settle for loving those you love right now. God brought you together, not to serve yourselves, but to reach out to others with the good news of Christ. There are people in Issaquah who need to experience

God's love through you, so let it overflow more and more. May new people come to know Christ because of you.

I pray that your love will abound in knowledge and insight about who and what God cares about. That means knowing God's Word. The world doesn't need mushy love that just loves without any thought; it needs love directed by wisdom from above about what really matters. Verse 10 tells us why- so you will be able to discern what is "best." In our day, the word best tends to describe the person who has the most skill and ability to do something better than everyone else. The Olympic competitor who runs or swims the fastest, or jumps the farthest, gets the gold medal that says they're the best. In the orchestra, the first violin chair is given to the best violinist. In school, As are given to the best papers.

But the Greek word translated best here means more than our idea of best; it stretches for what really matters. My prayer, Community Church of Issaquah, is that your love will grow in spiritual understanding so that you will be able to discern what really matters. I pray this because there are times coming when what really matters to God will be harder and more costly than what feels comfortable, familiar, and easy to you. You will be tempted in the days ahead to choose to keep the status quo, to do the same things you've always done the way you've always done them. You'll be tempted to choose what stretches your faith less, what asks for less sacrifice on behalf of others rather than choose what's best- what really matters. It can be very tempting to be satisfied for what's good rather than what's best. Let me give an example:

In a church where I was Worship Pastor, there was a young woman who was a very gifted singer who sang with our worship team. We had had two babies born within a couple weeks of each other. A beautiful baby girl had been born to a troubled unwed teenager, and a handsome baby boy had been born to a beloved young married couple. Two babies; different circumstances. The young woman asked to sing a hymn on the first Sunday that the baby boy came to church because that hymn had been sung on her first Sunday in church. I told her that singing the hymn and telling the story of why would be a blessing... BUT... I wanted her to dedicate it to both babies because they were both equally precious, in

spite of the difference in their circumstances. She said no, she wanted to sing it her way. When I encouraged her to see the grace in singing for both babies, she became very angry and said no. Later, as I prayed for wisdom, I heard the Spirit speak to my spirit, “Barbara, who will sing for Sandy (not her real name) if the young woman only sings for the baby boy? Don’t I love them both the same?” I held firm, and she did sing the hymn beautifully, but sadly chose not to tell why or dedicate it to either infant. It is a sad case of being satisfied with good, but missing what really mattered. This is my prayer- that you will be able to discern what really matters and will choose it in each decision ahead of you, trusting God to meet your own needs as you do. As Jesus said, “*Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these {other needs} will be added to you.*” Put your own desires and needs first, and you’ll miss what really matters. Put what really matters first, and you’ll get your own needs met with it and you will be able to stand “pure and blameless on the day of Christ.”

My friends, you have been a blessing to me more than you will ever know. It is sad to say good-bye. I have felt the sadness for days. Some people refuse to say good-bye because it sounds so sadly final. But “goodbye” is the right thing to say, because the word “goodbye” is a contraction of the old British phrase, “God be with ye.”

“Goodbye” is a word of hope and God’s blessing, because wherever we are, and wherever we go, the God who came among us in Jesus Christ is with us. When I say goodbye—“God be with ye”—to you, I believe that God’s Spirit will truly remain here among you. And when you say goodbye to me, you can trust that God’s Spirit goes with me. So friends, let’s not be afraid to say good-bye, even if tears come. What better gift can we leave one another than to ask God’s presence with us as we continue on our separate journeys?

BENEDICTION

God be with ye, my dear friends, may you discern what is best on the rest of your journey. Shalom!