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YES, THERE IS AND WILL BE TROUBLE, BUT GOD IS NOT DONE WITH YOU YET

by Pastor Clarissa Martinelli

Philippians 1:3-11

³ I thank my God every time I remember you, ⁴constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, ⁵because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. ⁹And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight ¹⁰to help you to determine what is best, so that on the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, ¹¹having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

Almost 18 months ago, we boldly yet humbly began this journey together with various degrees of Christian experiences. Some came wide-eyed, bushy tailed and sprinting towards the goal. And some still wet from their baptism and unsure what is happening – quietly sit or stand waiting and watching for their cue or encouragement to join the Christian band. Others have had some storms of life and can tell the story of how they got over. And then there are the old pros that have weathered the storms of life ten times over and have surely seen the miraculous and gracious acts of God in this troubled world for multiple decades.

But, irrespective of our experiences, age, race, gender, world views, economical status, and theological differences, I am confident that we have all been constrained by this great gospel, persuaded to love God more, and changed to glorify God.

Our text today exposes not only trouble in the text and in the world, but it also illuminates God's grace which has saturated humanity and creation through the ages. Friends, this gracious God will continue the good works that God has started in all of us until the day of completion, so that we can be transformed daily into the image of Christ, in order to love others and bring glory and praise to God.

Theologians have agreed that the book of Philippians was written by the Apostle Paul while imprisoned in Rome in the early 60s A.D. Philippians is an extremely encouraging letter written to the Philippian church. It is suggested that Paul was thanking the Philippians for their financial contribution they sent him while imprisoned. But, it is more than their financial gift at work here in this text. Paul thanks God that the Philippian Christian Community, shared, co-worked, and were partners with him in the sharing of the gospel, because as they gave their gift to Paul, they automatically became co-laborers in the gospel.

Yet, it is amazing, that, though Paul was incarcerated during a very difficult time in history, Paul had the audacity to encourage others in the faith, who were being persecuted for their radical beliefs in the risen Christ. However, let us not be confused by Paul's joyous accolades in our text. Paul and the Philippians had endured much trouble and tribulations. Nero was the Emperor of Rome, yes, the man who had his mom executed and blamed the newly formed Christians of starting the fire that destroyed much of Rome, which resulted in unbearable persecutions of Christians.

Paul, whom often referred to himself as the chief sinner, had been beaten, talked about, mistreated, shipwrecked, near naked, starved, chased out of town, and on more than one occasion, reminded about the atrocities he had committed in his past. Folks made sure to remind Paul that he was Paul of Tarsus, the one who persecuted and killed Christians. OUCH.

And the Christians that Paul is writing to in Philippi were inflicted as well. Timothy was trying to stay afloat and keep the early church focused on the mission that Jesus Christ left behind for them to complete. The New Testament tells us that the city of Philippi was a successful Roman colony, where the Philippian citizens had the luxury to be Roman Citizens, which meant they were exempt from paying certain taxes, had legal rights, and property advantage. Those who resided in

Philippi were often retired Philippian military men, Italians, Greeks, a.k.a. gentiles, with a very nominal Jewish presence. Philippi was an ethnically and religiously rich pluralistic society. But, it was extremely challenging, to put it nicely, for these Christians. They could not build a synagogue as they desired in this hostile environment; it was difficult to praise God, and difficult to glorify God. To praise and glorify God in 60 A.D. meant signing your death certificate.

We are not that much better off than Paul and the early Christians in Philippi if we contemplate long enough. We live in difficult times as well. Like Paul, in some capacity we have all been imprisoned either physically, mentally, emotionally, and or spiritually. We are persecuted for the very core beliefs that have shaped the intricate fabric of our beings. Week after week, day after day, worship service after worship service we try to join Paul in the sharing of this great Gospel. Yet, family, friends, co-workers, and mere strangers in a fraction of a nano-second confront you and can tear you down at the mere mention of being called a Christian. They will remind you of the atrocities you have committed in your past as you struggle to handle the consequences of being obedient to God.

And our churches? Well, many are plagued by factions and discords where human agendas reign supreme. Many of our churches have forgotten in whom our identity is grounded - Jesus, our savior whom we anxiously anticipate this Advent season.

And what about the world around us? A modern day Philippi does exist in America and beyond. Leave the comfort of Salem United Methodist Church and you won't have to stroll long to discover the world is a hostile environment for Christians, non-Christians, and everyone in between. Church of a Living God, there is trouble in the World. There is pride and selfishness in the people of the land, much like some of the Philippians who had dual citizenship or the Romans. This pride can easily manifest into individualism, materialism, and robust egos whose love for neighbor no longer overflows to the least of these. The old mighty dollar has become a God for some, but Scripture tells us, *"You cannot serve both God and money, for you will hate one and love the other."*

And most importantly, God's glory is jeopardized when we do not produce a harvest of righteousness in the world as Christians; complicating the work of

transformation, wholeness and restoration of humanity and creation, through our divinely inspired and radical love.

Perhaps, this is why Paul so eagerly encourages the Philippians to press on towards the goal for which they were called. Paul is fully aware of the troubles, persecutions, and distractions in the world. Perhaps this is even why Paul uses the word “joy” 16 times in the Book of Philippians, which is only four chapters long. Paul seemed to know for himself that he could rely on, cleave to, hope in, and have joy because he could claim God as a witness for himself to complete the good work God had started in his own life. Paul, yes, the same Paul of Tarsus, a previous persecutor of Christians himself, knew God’s grace personally, experienced it, tasted it, and saw that it was good.

Since Paul had this personal touch of God’s grace, he could share the good news with other believers in Philippi. The same gracious God who started a good work in him until completion, could and would do the same in the lives of the Philippians, so they could be transformed daily into the people God wanted them to be. People who loved God and loved neighbor. People who, through God’s mysterious grace, could grow in love, knowledge, and insight in order to make the world a better place to reside for all.

You know what, friends? The same gracious God who started a work in Paul and the Philippians, is also completing a good work in us and in the world. God is transforming us into vessels of God’s love, hope, and joy to share with others. God’s work and grace in the world comes through us. **Ephesians 2:10** tells us, *“We are God’s workmanship, created through Christ Jesus to do good works.”* Not mediocre works, but good works. Because when it comes to God, God does not create just mediocre and pedestrian work.

Since August 2012, we have bravely and vulnerably shared the gospel together as a unified front, just like Paul and the Philippians. We have and will continue, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to impact everyone and everything that we come into contact with. Because we, like Paul, have experienced, tasted, and seen God’s grace in very unique ways, which enable us to share the joy and the good news of the gospel to this hurting and hopeless world. We need to allow ourselves to be overflowed with God’s love, knowledge, and insight, so we will be able to discern

what our continued role is in this world. Our commission by God does not cease when the semester ends.

As I close, **Jeremiah 29:11** tells us, *“For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”* Therefore, for those who have committed yourselves to labor in God’s vineyard – with your gifts, tithes, times and talents, God is not done with you yet, so never forsake God’s grace and overflow of love, which will transform you and bring glory to God. For those who are weary and feel that you have nothing to offer, God surely and thankfully is not done with you yet, either. Therefore, never forsake God’s grace and overflow of love, because lookout, hold on tight - you are about to be mercifully and mightily transformed, brought into the glory of God. Praise God, Praise God my brothers and sisters, for “God is still speaking” and God is still working in the world.

Once upon a time, there were four people: their names were Everybody, Somebody, Nobody, and Anybody.

Whenever there was an important job to be done, Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it.

Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. When Nobody did it, Everybody got angry because ... it was Everybody's job!

Everybody thought that Somebody would do it, but Nobody realized that Nobody would do it.

So, consequently, Everybody blamed Somebody... when Nobody did what Anybody could have done in the first place!

~ Anonymous

Which Body Are You?

Amen. Amen. Amen.