

## ***'WHY I MISS YOU WHEN WE'RE APART'***

### **Philippians 1:1-11**

Dr. John Crocker. Crossroads Church, Albert Lea, MN. February 13, 2011

In the era of our great, great, great grandparents most people never ventured far from home, and there wasn't much variety in the goods available to them.

Today mobility and variety define life as we know it. So many Americans live more than 1,000 miles away from where they were born; and wherever you are you have oodles of options in what to wear, what to eat, where to work, and the kind of people you want to associate with.

If you've lived somewhere for even a short time and then move to different region, there's usually something you left behind that you miss. If you made friends, there are people you miss.

- Over the years lots of people have told me they miss the church they attended where they used to live. Some said that's what they miss most of all. I've even heard of people moving back largely because they miss their former church family.

During the prayer in a church service there was a moment of silence. Suddenly a small voice was heard throughout the whole sanctuary: *'Mommy, I want to go back to our other church.'*

- What gives a church such appeal? What makes a church attractive to you?

If we designed a church by people's tastes, I hate to think of the monstrosity we'd create. Our tastes are so different!

One of the funniest movies I ever saw was *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, produced about 35 years ago by South African film maker Jamie Uys. It's the story of a primitive Bushman from the Kalahari Desert. He's on a journey to get rid of a strange object that dropped out of the skies and somehow brought out the worst in the members of his tight-knit little clan. Actually it was just a coke bottle thrown out of an airplane. The nomadic Bushmen had never seen anything like it before and assumed it had come down from gods. In his travels to try to return the dastardly thing to the gods he came upon a young woman, a schoolteacher, stranded in a remote area. By our western standards she was knockout—a first-class babe. The Bushman expressed his opinion: he had never before seen such an unspeakably ugly creature. She was far from his taste in women.

Your concept of an attractive woman is radically different from that of a Kalahari Bushman. In the same way, opinions of an ideal church range from the glorious to the goofy.

Is the measure of an attractive church—a healthy church, a good church—just a matter of individual taste or personal opinion?

I don't think any of us would say yes to that.

- Christ has not left his church to be shaped by the vicissitudes of tastes and opinions.

The apostolic letters in the New Testament give us insights into healthy churches and sick churches. Not one of them is the perfect church, but the apostles present a clear picture of what Christ's church is supposed to be.

The church at Philippi in Macedonia was not a perfect church but it was a good church, an attractive church.

In the opening remarks of his letter to the Philippian church the Apostle Paul describes an attractive church—the kind of church you miss when you can't be there.

<sup>1</sup> Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:

<sup>2</sup> Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>3</sup> I thank my God every time I remember you.

<sup>4</sup> In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy

<sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,

<sup>6</sup> being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

<sup>7</sup> It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me.

<sup>8</sup> God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

<sup>9</sup> And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,

<sup>10</sup> so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,

<sup>11</sup> filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ-- to the glory and praise of God.

Your Church Board and Senior Pastor Search Team have worked hard on a description of who we are as the Crossroads Church family. How did we become who we are as a church; why do we exist; what is our vision for Crossroad's role as a church in this region in the future.

Next Sunday, our Church Chairman Dean Leonard will share some of this with us. It's crucial that we as a church family are united in embracing a vision for our church that is based not on fickle tastes, but on the principles of God's word.

This letter from the Apostle Paul to the Philippian Church will be very helpful to us.

This is actually the most personal of all Paul's letters to the various churches in the New Testament.

In the New Testament era there were no church buildings. The church in the city of Philippi in Macedonia was probably a collection of several house churches.

### **Philippi:**

Philippi was built and fortified by Philip II of Macedon (the father of Alexander the Great) in the 4<sup>th</sup>. Century BC. He named the city after himself.

Caesar Augustus, the Roman Emperor later established a military outpost at Philippi and made it a colony of Rome.

Citizens of Philippi enjoyed the same status and rights as citizens of Rome in Italy.

- The church at Philippi was founded in A.D. 50 in the course of Paul's second missionary journey. We read about it in Acts 16.

In a night vision a man of Macedonia begged the Apostle Paul, '*Come over to Macedonia and help us.*'

Paul concluded that God was calling him to preach the gospel there (Acts 16:9, 10).

So Paul came to Philippi along with Silas, Timothy and Luke.

- When Paul came to Philippi, he crossed over from Asia Minor into Europe. So this was the beginning of his work as an apostle of Jesus Christ in Europe.

The church at Philippi may have been the first European church.

- According to Acts 16 the first person to come to faith in Christ in Philippi was a woman, Lydia.

Lydia had moved to Philippi to sell a special kind of cloth that was dyed in her home town of Thyatira in north Lydia (Asia Minor).

She and her family became the first Christians in Europe (Acts 16:14, 15) and the fledgling Christian church of Philippi began to meet in her home (16:15, 40)

- Paul ran into trouble at Philippi when he exorcised a demon from a slave girl fortune-teller who had provided a substantial income for her owners (Acts 16:19-21).

Her owners were furious. They brought Paul and Silas before the authorities (*stratego*), and accused them of teaching customs that were against Roman law.

The magistrates ordered Paul and Silas to be stripped and flogged. Without a trial they were thrown into prison and their feet were fastened between blocks of wood called 'the stocks.'

In 1 Thessalonians 2:2 Paul wrote to the Church at Thessalonica, about 100 miles to the west, '*We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition.*'

- How long did Paul stay on in Philippi?

By the time of the incident involving the fortune-teller, they may already have been in Philippi for quite some time.

Paul left behind a faithful church and long after his death it remained strong in the Christian faith.

- Paul visited Philippi a second time in A.D. 55-56 on his third missionary journey (Acts 20:1-6). He passed through on his way to Corinth, and must have passed through Philippi again on his return, on the way to Jerusalem with the collection for the poor there.

At Jerusalem Paul was arrested and then imprisoned in Caesarea and later in Rome.

While he was incarcerated, either in Caesarea or in Rome, he wrote this letter to the Philippian church.

- The theme of joy runs throughout Paul's letter. It's a letter of Christian joy.

Philippians is a Christ-centered letter. The names Jesus Christ, Christ Jesus, Lord Jesus Christ, Lord Jesus, Jesus, Christ, Lord, and Savior, occur 51 times in the 104 verses of the letter.

We find the name of "Christ" or "Jesus" seventeen times in just this first chapter alone.

**1:1** *Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus. To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons.*

**1:2** *Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

It is said that *churches, just like bread, do not rise without the right ingredients.*

Let us look at some qualities of a good church, drawn from Paul's remarks in Philippians 1:1-11.

## **I. A LIVING CHURCH (1:3-6)**

It's alive! It's a church that is thriving; not shriveling or stagnant.

It's a church that is well-poised to make a powerful impact on the community because the good news of Jesus Christ is its priority.

**1:3** *I thank my God every time I remember you.*

**1:4** *In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy*

**1:5** *because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,*

**1:6** *being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

Paul thanked God every time he thought of them

It's a sad testimony that what could be said of some churches is, *'I shudder/groan every time I remember you.'*

His brothers and sisters in the Philippian Church were Paul's partners in his gospel work. He prayed for them, and he was confident that nothing could cancel what God had begun in them.

- Fourteen years ago God began a good work in some people in this Albert Lea area. That work of God became Crossroads Church. God is still at work among us.

It's not over, and it won't be over until the day of Jesus Christ..

That means we don't have the option to settling down and becoming comfortable as a church.

The Search Team is communicating to each potential Senior Pastor candidate that we as a church are not interested in just maintaining things that are familiar and safe and comfortable.

Our Church's Purpose statement reads: (Please read it with me).

The purpose of Crossroads Church is to prayerfully introduce people to Jesus, grow them to be like Jesus, care for others, minister to others and to glorify God.

I say this with all truthfulness: I have never been in a church that is more poised to move ahead and accomplish great things for Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit than Crossroads is right now.

We've had some months of soul-searching and healing and reaffirming our commitment.

Back in the era when steam locomotives were used on railways, a passenger rushed to board a train. He asked the Pullman Porter, Is the train ready to ready to go? The porter answered, *She's not quite ready, sir, but she's a-twitchin'*

I believe with all my heart that Crossroads Church is *a-twtichin'*. The Lord has a Senior Pastor of his choice ready to be revealed to us.

The Church at Philippi was not perfect, and we're not perfect. But we're ready, and eager to move on in reaching this Freeborn County region with the good news of Jesus Christ.

## **II. A LOVING CHURCH. Philippians 1:7-8**

Some of you may have come to us from another city; another church. Do you miss the church you belonged to there? Why?

Are your reasons similar to the reasons Paul missed the Philippians?

**1:7** *It is right for me to feel this way about all you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me.*

**1:8** *God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.*

A few months ago a man greeted me out in the Welcome Center. He told me that he and his wife Apryl and their family had just returned to Crossroads. They had been part of Crossroads for several years and God had done great things in his family during those years. Then a work-related matter meant leaving Albert Lea. They were away from Crossroads for several years. He told me how they had longed for Crossroads while they were away, and how pleased they were to come back home to Crossroads. I've asked Trent Gorton to come and take a few minutes to tell us about the way God used Crossroads in his family and about what they have found in Crossroads upon their return.

- If ever a pastor loved a church, none ever loved with more intensity than Paul loved the Philippian church.

## **III. A GROWING CHURCH. Philippians 1:9-11**

This is about church growth. But not numerical growth.

**1:9** *And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,*  
**1:10** *so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,*  
**1:11** *filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ--to the glory and praise of God.*

Paul's prayer reveals his priorities for the Philippian church.

Paul prayed that they would grow (abound), not in numbers but in love that is grounded in full knowledge and insight and wise judgment about what really matters.

In the car on the way home after a Sunday service a woman asked her husband: *What did you think of the designer suit the lady in front of you was wearing—and the frilly blue dress on the gal sitting to your left—and Mrs. Brown's bold new hairdo?* Husband: *Can't say I noticed. I confess I dozed off.* Wife: *Lot of good church does you!*

Paul pinpoints a pastor's longing in this part of his letter--that Christians will grasp the truth about what really matters.

That's how the Purpose Statement we just read keeps it in view for us.

What is your response?

Are you ready to join with the Board and the Search Team of Crossroads in declaring that God who began a good work here in Albert Lea will continue it in his power? He will, if we will commit ourselves to his purpose. We're not going to play it safe and be a comfortable church that exists to satisfy our tastes. We're going to reach people for Jesus Christ.

How are your relationships in the church? Is there still something you need to work out in your own heart with God or with someone else, so that you can truly say that the affection you have for the Crossroads family is like a longing in your heart?

Are you growing as a Christian the way Paul describes it here? Do you have a growing insight into what is best and what really matters in our church?

This is what the Search Team is communicating to any prospective candidate for Senior Pastor of Crossroads.