

Thanksgiving for Partnerships

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- [0 : 0 0] Father, speak to us from your word now we pray that our hearts may be filled with thankfulness to you for your goodness and grace and the privilege of knowing you and serving you in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Amen. I want to begin by thanking you today for I am thankful for all of those who are members of and part of Holy Trinity.
- In my prayers I'm certainly thankful for this church. When on holidays sometimes I go to other churches I must confess that most of the time I leave more thankful for Holy Trinity if you understand what I mean.
- And as an archdeacon involved with currently 35 other Anglican churches around about in the eastern region of Melbourne as their archdeacon I guess it's a little bit biased because often I have to help deal with some of their problems but usually the vast majority of times I come away more thankful for being at Holy Trinity and more thankful for the people here and so on.
- And certainly when I think of Holy Trinity 99 times out of 100 I am full of joy and thanks to God. And there is much for which I give thanks here. Some obvious things I suppose.
- [1 : 2 0] People's care of me and love of me. Thank you for getting paid every month, for having a house to live in, thankful for people's hospitality. I've been thankful every year that I've been here for a godly vestry and church wardens and the leaders of various Christian groups within the parish and so on.
- There's something perhaps even more important that our reading today directs me to as well as each one of us to by way of reason to give God thanks. In this passage my namesake Paul, although I'm sure I wasn't named after him, expresses his thanks to God for the Philippian church.
- This is a church that he seems to have had a particularly soft spot for. And like me here, his association with them as he writes this letter spans approximately 10 years.
- If you read in the Acts of the Apostles chapter 16, Paul founds the church at Philippi. He does so, we might say somewhat reluctantly because he had been keen to stay in what is modern Turkey in Asia Minor, there ministering for the gospel.
- But God closed doors there and guided him and led him over into Europe where in northern Greece in Macedonia he settled at Philippi and founded the church there.
- [2 : 4 4] It was a significant Roman colony in those days, a significant and strategic crossroads really and that's presumably why Paul chose this place to settle and minister the gospel.
- And if you read in the Acts of the Apostles chapter 16, we know that when he was there, his first convert was a woman called Lydia, a businesswoman, perhaps a fairly wealthy woman.
- When I was leading a tour two years ago in Greece and Turkey seeing the biblical sites, Lydia Kinder from our 8 o'clock congregation was part of that tour. So we sort of re-enacted Paul baptising Lydia in the river that runs through Philippi.

While the Apostle Paul was there, a demon-possessed woman was freed of her demons. And even though Paul at some point was imprisoned for his preaching of the gospel, the jailer and his family were converted and baptised through his ministry there.

Paul left after a shortish time in Philippi, heading further south to Berea and Thessalonica and then ultimately to Athens and Corinth, founding churches in those places also.

[3 : 53] The association though with the Christians in Philippi did not stop when he left. This letter, the letter here in the New Testament to the Philippians is occasioned by their gift to him of money for him and ministry and for the care of the poor in Jerusalem and so on.

And so he says in verse 5, you have shared in the gospel from the first day until now. A period of 10 years approximately it seems from the time of Paul's arrival in Philippi and the first convert through to this writing of this letter, he has shared in partnership in the gospel to this very day.

In verse 7 he expresses that in the terms of you all share in God's grace with me. Another way of saying they are partners in the gospel with him. And elsewhere in the letter we just glean a few things.

They are prayers for him later in chapter 1, they've suffered for the gospel at the end of chapter 1 and chapter 2 it seems that they've sent a messenger to him with gifts and that's certainly why this letter is written as well.

So these are not mere idle parishioners who just warm pews on a Sunday and that's it. They are people who have been partners with Paul in the gospel, sharers in God's grace with him.

[5 : 13] They're active in many ways and their association with Paul is not purely social, it is an association, a partnership that is because of the gospel.

They are partners in their money and giving, partners in their love for each other and for him and other Christians whom they've not even met. They are partners in prayer for Paul, they are partners in time in serving the gospel.

So they are partners, not just social partners, friends, colleagues but what binds them together is partnership in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So the issue is not just partnership, the issue is partnership in the gospel and that's what Paul is giving thanks to God for in this opening paragraph of the letter.

And that is certainly one of the great things for which I give thanks to God for people here at Holy Trinity because so many of you, so many of our church members are not just members in name but are partners in the gospel together.

[6 : 20] So there are many of our groups within our church life that are clearly gospel groups to grow Christians, to spread the gospel, to promote the gospel so that other people will become Christians and place their faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

That's partnership together in the gospel. There are so many people who use their gifts and skills not just because they want to be up front and to be seen and noticed and receive acclaim but because they want to serve the gospel, the gospel of Jesus Christ who died for us and rose again that we may have a relationship with God.

So there are so many who use their gifts whether it's in music or catering, in visiting, in pastoral care, in teaching, in administration who are partners in the gospel for that's what motivates them, that's why they are serving in such ways.

There are so many people who love other people for the sake of the gospel. So who have befriended their neighbours or people in the street or in probes or in social groups or at work not just because they want more friends, not just because those people they like but because they're motivated by the gospel to commend Jesus Christ and to win such people for him and to faith in him.

There are so many here who are involved in cross-cultural partnership of the gospel, those who teach ESL, those who befriend some of our Chinese congregation and so on, those who support our missionaries in Nigeria and Russia and Nepal and next year in the Middle East as well as in other parts of Australia.

[8 : 01] There are those who are partners in the gospel by giving their money to Holy Trinity. My thanks is not just because I get paid but because we are expressing together our partnership in promoting the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There are those who pray in their daily prayers, in their regular prayers, coming to prayer meetings, praying in church and so on. For me, for the staff, for Holy Trinity's ministry, for the groups within Holy Trinity, for people to become Christians and grow as Christians.

That's partnership in the gospel. And there are so many who are committed to regular church attendance, not just because they want to be sponges to receive but rather because they want to edify and build up and encourage each other in gospel life and ministry and godliness and so on.

I say all this because I don't want you to underestimate the importance of being a partner in the gospel together here. When one of our Chinese new immigrants, for example, or overseas students is befriended by one of our Chinese congregation, brought along to church, evangelised and disciplined by David and Esther and then I baptised them in a Mandarin service and so on and they come to Christian faith, you are partners in the gospel in that.

Whether or not you've ever met that person, whether or not you ever will this side of heaven because of your prayers for that ministry, because of your giving that enables David and Esther and hopefully next year a Mandarin youth worker to be on staff to be involved in that ministry, because of your giving to extend this building so that we can provide more gospel opportunities to people.

[9 : 43] When a Nigerian person is helped by Elspeth Young in issues of HIV and AIDS, then that is our partnership in the gospel in Nigeria, whether or not we know that person or ever we'll meet that person this side of heaven because of our financial prayer and love support for our befriending Peter and Elspeth when they come home on leave to encourage them to persevere in the ministry to which God's called them in Nigeria.

When our children are taught the gospel in Sunday school and their parents are encouraged to be Christian parents and are given resources through the library or through Sunday school or others who help here, that's our partnership in the gospel.

Our encouragement of Christian parents, our support for our Sunday school teachers, those who actually use their gifts and time to teach the Sunday school and so on. That's our partnership in the gospel together as we support it in our giving, in our prayers, in our love, our encouragement, when we care for and befriend and get to know the little children of other people in our congregation.

When even tomorrow maybe a hundred people who are not Christians will hear me preach the gospel at Nora Lester's funeral here. She was a faithful Christian but many of her family and friends were not Christians.

So when they hear the gospel tomorrow preached in her funeral service, that's your partnership in the gospel. It's not just my ministry. You're the ones who are partners as well because of your prayers for me, your prayers for Nora and her family, because of your giving to enable this building to be here and so on.

[11 : 17] It's your partnership in the gospel if you're helping with the afternoon tea after the funeral, for example. We're doing it for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ. When I went and preached and taught in China in July, that's not my ministry, it's our ministry as you release me to be away for 10 days or so to be teaching and preaching there.

Now the list can go on and on and on. What I'm wanting us to understand and that's Paul's language here of being partners in the gospel is that my ministry is your ministry and all the aspects of ministry of Holy Trinity both on site, in the building, in our homes, in our neighbourhoods, in our workplaces, in our schools and overseas through our missionaries and elsewhere, we are partners together in a ministry of the gospel that is very vast and very wide.

We do not always see everything that's going on but through prayers and giving, through love and mutual encouragement, we are partners together in the gospel. You see, not everyone's an evangelist.

Not everyone is set apart to be a minister of the word and sacrament. Not everyone is called to be able to preach an evangelistic sermon or to take someone through the Christian faith or whatever but we are all called to be supporters, promoters and partners in the gospel of Jesus Christ through our words to other people, through our giving, through our prayers, through our love, through our deeds, through our acts of kindness, through our godly character that commends the gospel of Jesus to others.

And we're not just doing that individually but we do that together as partners in the gospel and for that partnership I do give God thanks. This partnership is profoundly important.

[13 : 07] It's not at all just a social thing. It's not just that we're all sort of buddies and friends and enjoy being together. It's that we're together in God's business.

So we're partners together in God's gospel and we're partners with God in the purpose of his gospel because God's gospel is the thing that drives God to keep this world going.

God's gospel is what drives God to sustain this universe so that through the death and resurrection of Jesus 2,000 years ago still today and until this world ends people may come to a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

that's why it's all here. That's why this world exists. It's God's number one top priority and we have been called to the wonderful privilege and responsibility of being partners together and partners with God in the ministry of his gospel.

people It's a challenge also to us I think because it's easy to be complacent and it's easy to just fall into comfortable things where we enjoy each other's company so we gather together but it's social not gospel oriented and so a challenge I guess in all of this is to ensure that our lives our relationships our activities our groups our involvement our activity our use of our gifts our giving our time our money our prayers are all harnessed together for the sake of God's gospel of Jesus Christ.

[14 : 43] Paul notes in this passage does not thank the Philippians for their partnership. He doesn't say thanks very much I really appreciate your partnership look at all that you've done for me thank you not at all.

His prayer begins in verse 3 I thank my God every time I remember you in my prayers. He's telling them that he thanks God for them he's not thanking them for their support of him.

This is an issue I actually struggle with a bit in some senses because I think I'm not very strong at encouragement and one reason I think is that I'm a bit reluctant to thank people too much for what they do at Holy Trinity because I in no way want to see people doing things for my sake.

No one should do anything for my sake we should all be active for God's sake for the gospel's sake and so this has helped me think through a bit that rather than saying thanks for what you've done I really appreciate it I need to try and word it in a way that says I thank God for what you've done for your partnership in the gospel so I'm going to try and work harder at working out that sort of without being too convoluted that sort of language I guess.

Notice too that Paul is expressing his thanks to God for another reason you see it's actually easy to do things and be involved because we want other people's acknowledgement and sadly I do see this from time to time that people become a little bit annoyed or bitter if they're not thanked enough or acknowledged enough.

[16 : 28] Paul thanks God for God is the one whom we're serving and it is God's approval whom we seek and whilst it's nice to be thanked and nice to be acknowledged it's far from essential and too often it compromises our motives.

We are serving for God's sake and for his final commendation on that last day well done my good and faithful servant. It's a reminder to us that even those acts that are unseen by other humans are seen by God those that are never acknowledged by others are acknowledged by God.

It's a reminder to us that it is God's commendation we seek not humans. Finally in this prayer Paul gives thanks because he sees in their partnership in the gospel God's work not human work.

It's an important thing to grasp I think. He says in verse 5 because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now and that could be by itself an expression of your work your human activity and to an extent it is.

But notice how he goes on in verse 6 for I 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. What he's saying is that to you Philippians your partnership in the gospel your labours your prayers your giving your activity is God's work in you and among you.

[18 : 10] It is God who's energised you to do that work and to be involved in a partnership in the gospel and that's why he thanks God because fundamentally it's God's work.

So when someone at Holy Trinity is involved in teaching our children the gospel or someone's involved in serving God's people through catering or admin or music or reading the Bible or teaching RE in schools or whatever it is that is actually God's work in you.

It is evidence of God who's begun a good work in you and Paul knows that God's faithful and what God begins he finishes unlike so many of us and so he's able to express with confidence in verse 6 because I see your partnership in the gospel with me Paul the apostle I see that as God's work and what God begins God completes and so he can say in this wonderful verse 6 a great verse I'm confident of this that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ what will that look like on the day of Jesus Christ the day when Jesus returns and this world ends expresses it a bit more detail in verse 10 in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ you see partnership in the gospel now is producing a harvest of righteousness in ourselves and in those to whom we minister with the gospel that will be completed on the day of

Christ and it's completed by our purity and blamelessness of character and behaviour which will only be completed on that final day that's why Paul prays in verse 9 that their love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best that is he's thankful for the evidence of God's work in their midst he knows that that will be completed by God on the final day and so he prays for the gap between today and then that their love will overflow more and more in knowledge and true insight well here is Paul writing to the Philippians nearly 10 years after he founded that church he's writing full of thanks and writing full of joy there's nowhere in this letter that we get any hint of oh wasn't it a great time when we went to the opera at the Philippi theatre you can still walk amongst its ruins today I would have thought an opera there would be very pleasant on a nice day or he doesn't sort of write and say wasn't it a lovely time when we had that barbecue and played croquet on Lydia's lawn he doesn't write and say I enjoy being in

Philippi because the sun sets from Acro Philippi the little hill over Philippi looking down the Ignatian way they were so beautiful what motivates his joy and thanks is partnership in the gospel it's far more important it's far more lasting it challenges us in our own priorities what we work for what we look for what we long for what gives us hearts of thanks and hearts of joy so today as we think about giving God thanks for his blessings to us at the heart of that let us be thankful for the wonderful privilege and responsibility of being partners in God's gospel together let's be truly thankful that God himself is at work amongst us let's be full of joy being sharers together in God's grace and let us be thankful with confidence because as we see God's work in us and among us then we can be confident that

[22 : 04] God will complete what he's begun in us and among us as we long for with God the harvest of righteousness produced and our lives pure and blameless in his sight amen later in glory pour into glory potrzeb