

“Be Worthy of the Gospel!”

In our Scripture, the Apostle Paul raised the subjects of dying to be with Jesus and of living a life worthy of the gospel of Christ. Ronnie Miller addressed the issue of evaluating one’s Christian life, when he asked, “How would you rate your self as a Christian on a scale from 1 to 10? Better yet how would your family and friends rate you on the same scale? People see you and (me in) a different perspective than we do ourselves.”

Miller continued, “For the people who have Internet, I’m sure (you) have encountered eBay at some point and time. It’s an auction place where you can buy and sell just about anything you can imagine and it’s run by ordinary folks just like you and (me). If you want to sell something, just put a picture and information on their web site, and a small fee gets whatever your selling in front of millions of people, and the same if you want to buy something. It’s from people just like you and (me) that want to sell and buy.”

Miller explained further, “When a member of eBay buys or sells something each member has a feedback area which is filled out when each deal is done. If the buyer or seller didn’t do what they were suppose to or lied about their product then its recorded under their name so everybody can see just how honest he or she really is. People try hard to satisfy whoever they are dealing with because of that feedback against their name from complete strangers. It’s amazing how hard people try to be nice to others and do the right thing when their own name is on the line.”

Miller concluded, “Paul was encouraging the people of Philippi to do the right thing in their faith for Christ.” (Ronnie Miller posted on SermonCentral.com)

The Apostle Paul was pulled between dying – going to be with Jesus and continuing to serve Christ in the world – fulfilling his meaning and purpose. Like the eBay sellers, who want to be seen, as “doing the right thing” – of having a good reputation, Paul was very defensive about attacks on his own integrity. On a more positive side, Paul’s struggle and focus on his purpose or meaning provides a good example of the type of life Jesus calls us to follow. Sally Quinn, author of the new book, *Finding Magic*, shared an important insight on this when she told Chuck Todd in an interview, “too many people are searching for happiness, which is the wrong way to look at it. They’re looking for happiness to find meaning. When in fact, you need to find meaning to become happy.”

The Apostle went on to connect his realization that he needed to stay and serve Jesus as his meaning – purpose, in order, to help the Philippians and other Christians, including us, grow in our Faith Relationship with God. According to the Good News – Today’s English Version Pew Bibles, he then wrote in **verse 27a**, **“Now, the important thing is that your way of life should be as the gospel of Christ requires”**. In the remainder of verse 27, Paul implied living one’s life in accordance with the gospel of Christ results in us **“standing firm with one common purpose and ... with only one desire” to fight “together for the faith of the gospel.”** That “for the faith of the gospel” clearly refers to our abiding in the Faith Relationship with God. With reference to the beginning of verse 27, I find it more helpful to use the quote from the New Revised Standard Version, which we have on our Worship Bulletin Cover, **“live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”**

What did the Apostle mean by calling us to live our lives in a way which is “worthy of the gospel of Christ”? Now, it might surprise you to hear me say living worthy of the gospel of Christ is not so much about not doing something wrong. Instead, it is about living and doing things so they help others – just as Jesus would do them. First, do we follow Jesus’ example of respecting, welcoming, forgiving, and loving everyone? Second, are we manifesting God’s Agape – Sacrificial and Suffering Love – actually experiencing hardship, pain, and the giving up of time, energy and other resources for the welfare of one another and other persons? Third, we need to speak up and stand up for those who are in need of justice, especially the vulnerable – the sick, the grieving, the oppressed, the elderly, and the poor. And finally, we are called to invite others to share in God’s Forgiveness, Welcome, and Agape Love, so they too will be able to live lives worthy of the gospel of Christ!

Now, living lives worthy of the Gospel of Christ is not a get it done and over with process. Instead, it is an ongoing endeavor – a work in progress. The following video reminds us of our Divine Parent’s and Jesus’ roles in this process. [Please show the video, “Work in Progress”.]

Some of the message of that video uses the tried and true terminology, which, frankly, is not clearly defined and may encourage us to have a self-centered view of things. However, I believe we receive needed encouragement and

insight in the part of the video, which included these words, “In spite of my weakness, He’s strengthening my inner being to overcome my circumstances. Why should I just survive as a victim when I get to thrive in His Kingdom? Showing the world what Jesus can do through me – letting them see his love and mercy because he gives us the power of forgiveness. We are all just a work in progress.”

Paul recognized we might be a little afraid of how some people will respond to our living this New Life in Christ and the New Faith Relationship with God. He shared his bold response to those fears in **verse 28**, ***“Don’t be afraid of your enemies; always be courageous, and this will prove to them that they will lose and that you will win, because it is God Who gives you the victory.”*** Yes, living the life, which is worthy of the gospel of Christ, includes trusting God will be with you as you face whatever difficulties! How can you or I know our Divine Parent is Trustworthy? Because, God sent the Only Son, Jesus the Christ, to be God’s Invitation to the New Faith Relationship with God and to prove our Divine Parent’s Commitment and Agape Love for us in Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection!

The Apostle brought this call to live lives worthy of the gospel of Christ to a conclusion in our Reading by writing in **verses 29 and 30**, ***“For you have been given the privilege of serving Christ, not only by believing in him, but also by suffering for him. Now you can take part with me in the battle. It is the same battle you saw me fighting in the past, and as you hear, the one I am fighting still.”*** It is a battle in our society to live the New Life in Christ. It does call forth living agape – suffering love for Christ toward everyone. The world’s selfish and self-centered approach to living is constantly tempting and challenging us to give in to its self-aggrandizing way of life. It tries to bully or beat us down into submission – calling us names like losers because we are suffering or giving of ourselves and resources for Jesus Christ.

Although it is always wonderful to receive new members, our call is not to be the largest congregation or the wealthiest or the most powerful. It is to live lives, which are worthy or in the way of the gospel of Christ – following Jesus’ example. With that recognition, Bruce Howell wrote, “I’m sure you’ve heard the classic story about the faithful pastor who was told by his superior that something was wrong with his work. The supervisor told him, ‘Only one person has been added to your church this year, and he is only a boy.’ Later that day, heavy of heart, the pastor was praying when someone walked up behind him. Turning around, he saw the same boy — his only convert that year. The boy said, ‘Pastor, do you think I could become a preacher or missionary some day?’ The pastor encouraged him to pray and seek God about it. The lad was Robert Moffit who was destined to open Africa to the Gospel of Christ. Years later when Moffit spoke in London, a young doctor heard him say, ‘I have seen in the morning sun the smoke of a thousand villages where no missionary has ever been.’ The young doctor, deeply moved by Moffit’s message, was none other than David Livingstone. In 1840, he sailed for Africa where he labored for Jesus for more than three decades — all of this happened because a faithful pastor encouraged his ‘one convert.’ (Bruce Howell posted on SermonCentral.com)

Friends, this congregation has touched many lives in its 116 year history and we will continue to do so! However, it does require our willingness to suffer – the giving of ourselves and our resources in our living lives which are worthy of the gospel of Christ.

♥Trust in God’s Loving Support and Presence!

♥Follow Jesus’ example of respecting, welcoming, forgiving, and loving everyone!

♥Manifest God’s Agape – Sacrificial and Suffering Love – actually, experience hardship, pain, and the giving up of time, energy and other resources for the welfare of one another and other persons!

♥Speak up and stand up for those in need of justice, especially the vulnerable – the sick, the grieving, the oppressed, the elderly, and the poor!

♥Invite others to share in God’s Forgiveness, Welcome, and Agape Love, so they too will be able to live lives worthy of the gospel of Christ! Amen.