

Lectio on a Catena (a chain of scriptural quotations) from Philippians

This lectio is an offering during the time that many (but not all) of us are sheltered in our homes, awaiting the passing of the coronavirus. The sequence of passages was chosen for its relevance to our shared work on callings and for its reflection on the meaning of community when we are physically absent from community. Some questions it puts before us are:

- What is my calling now, as I work from home or work in a job that requires my presence even when others are able to stay at home?
- What loves are most important now?
- What risks and what carefulness are important now?
- What should I focus on now?

The Situation

Paul is writing to the assembly in Philippi from prison, likely in Ephesus.

- Ancient prisons were notoriously brutal places. Prisoners depended upon their social group to bring them the basic necessities: clothing, a blanket, food.
- As an act of solidarity and love, the Philippians had sent Epaphroditus to care for Paul, and during the time he was carrying out his mission of mercy he nearly died. He has recovered now, but the community is well aware of the risk they took in sending him.

A recurring theme of the letter is Paul's rumination on his *presence* to the Philippians in prayer and concern during the time that he remains *physically absent* from them.

- He wonders whether he will die in prison, never having had the chance to see them again, and not knowing whether they will be able to stay strong under persecution in their own context.
- In response to the seriousness of the situation, Paul establishes the widest possible frame of reference for his thoughts: God's ultimate purposes for the whole creation, made manifest on the "day of Jesus Christ."

Some Themes

- **Joy** as a chosen posture of counter-cultural faithfulness in all circumstances.
- **Prayer** as a substance of communion with God and those to whom one is connected in Christ.
- **Love** as a channel for discernment.

- The importance of **the body** as a site of Christ-shaped love in community, even while recognizing the body's fragility and ephemerality.
- **Partnership** (*koinonia*) as a basic Christian practice that mirrors forth the body of Christ.

The Catena

I thank my God every time I remember you,
constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you,
because of your partnering in the gospel from the first day until now.
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 (1:3-6).

And this is my prayer:
that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight
to help you to discern what is best,
so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless,
having produced the harvest of righteousness
that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God (1:9-11)

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus (2:5).

It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame in any way,
but that by my speaking with all boldness,
Christ will be exalted now as always in my body,
whether by life or by death (1:20).

Live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ,
so that, whether I come and see you
or am absent and hear about you,
I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit,
striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel,
and are in no way intimidated by your opponents (1:27-28).

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.

Therefore, my beloved,
just as you have always obeyed,
not only in my presence,
but much more now in my absence,
work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;
for it is God who is at work among you,
enabling you both to will and to work for God's good pleasure (2:12-13).

Rejoice in the Lord always;
again I will say, Rejoice.
Let your gentleness be known to everyone.
The Lord is near.
Do not worry,
but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving
let your requests be made known to God.
Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.

And the peace of God,
which surpasses all understanding,
will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (4:4-7).

Whatever is true,
whatever is honorable,
whatever is just,
whatever is pure,
whatever is pleasing,
whatever is commendable,
if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise,
take account of these things (4:8).

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.