



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for November 7, 2021
"Partnership in the Gospel"
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Philippians 1:3-8

Partnerships

There are simply some things we can do together, that we can't do if left to ourselves. This will be the subject of what we will be talking about over the next three Sunday as we consider our common life together. During that time, we will be considering our *"partnership in the gospel."*

I will be the first to tell you that I am not a lawyer. It's not in my nature to be one. I am not a legalist, although I make every effort to uphold the law. I do know enough about the law to know that there are all different sorts of partnerships that can be formed. A partnership is essentially *"a self-sacrificing conformity to a shared vision."*

One type of partnership that pushes the envelope when it comes to that is a Limited Liability Partnership. A limited liability partnership, or an LLP, essentially states that those in the partnership are not liable for the actions of the other. An LLP essentially says, *"You do your thing, and I'll do mine."* A partnership should cut much deeper. It should involve self-sacrifice. It should be riveted on a clear and compelling vision. And it should have all involved moving in the same direction.

Partnerships that work well are based on relationships that are strong and secure. Everyone works toward the same goal, however broadly that goal might be defined. Partnerships don't mean that everyone must think alike, they just mean that everyone involved is moving in the same direction.

This morning we read about a partnership, *"a partnership in the gospel."* It's a partnership struck between Paul and his beloved church in Philippi. Let's pause to read about that partnership. Let's hear this reading from Philippians 1:3-6

Philippians 1:3-6

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 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.

Mission Letters

I get a mission letter at least three or four times a week.

A mission letter is correspondence from some missionary or mission sharing about their work. A mission letter usually includes a word of thanks, an explanation of the work being done, a request for prayer, and, of course, an appeal for financial support. I am not put off by mission letters. To the contrary I enjoy reading them and learning about God's work around the world. In some cases, I will even partner with a mission by sending financial aid.

You might say that Paul's letter to the church in Philippi was a mission letter of sorts. He was writing to a church he deeply loved. In fact, he expresses his joy about the church. The word "joy" is used sixteen times in this relatively short letter. Paul is quick to share how he thanks God every time he remembers the Philippians. He states that his prayers for them are always filled with "joy."

Paul and the Church in Philippi

Last week, Ashlee gave us a little bit of information about the church in Philippi when she talked about Lydia and her conversion. Lydia was the first convert in Macedonia. She and her household were won to the faith. Later, Paul freed a slave girl of a demonic spirit, which eventually landed him in jail. While in jail, the jailer who supervised him was won to Christ. This group of uncommon converts formed the nucleus of the Philippian Church, a church that abounded in every way.

Paul, on the other hand, was asked to leave town, partly because the powers that be found out he was a Roman citizen and they feared what he might do in response to him being put in jail. The church in Philippi was left to fend for itself, save for the power of the Spirit in their midst.

Paul eventually made his way to Rome and was placed under house arrest. Even though he was "*imprisoned*," Paul had a steady stream of people come and see him. Not to be undone by "*imprisonment*," Paul continued to spread the gospel. While under house arrest Paul received a handsome gift from the Philippian Church. His thank you to that church is what we know as the Book of Philippians. Paul expressed his thanks for their "*partnership in the gospel*." Clearly, Paul felt a kinship with the church. He knew they were on the same page when it came to spreading the gospel. All of that was cemented by the financial gift the church offered.

A Partnership in the Gospel

Partnership can mean many things. It certainly means fellowship. It means being of the same mind. It also has a financial component to it. The gift the Philippians shared with Paul brought them closer together. Paul knew that their pocketbook was aligned with their heart, not only for him, but for the gospel.

As I mentioned to earlier, Paul wrote to a church he deeply loved. He was deeply appreciative for the support the church directed his way. Paul expressed his appreciation not only to the church, but to God. Paul prayed for the church all the time, thanking God for who they were and what they were doing.

“I thank my God every time I remember you,” he writes, “in all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.”

- The partnership that Paul talks about was without a doubt founded in Christ. We need to remember that as we consider our own partnership as a church.
- The partnership between Paul and the Philippian Church was expressed in a generosity which was borne out of a deep desire to be faithful to Christ. We also need to remember that as we consider our partnership as a church.

The Philippian Church gave themselves to Christ, first and foremost. They also gave themselves to one another. Theirs was not a business partnership, but a spiritual one. It was a partnership based on relationships—vertically with God and horizontally with one another. Those relationships increased the likelihood of them achieving their vision and amplifying their reach into the world.

Community

One of the core values of our church is community. That notion of community cuts at least two ways.

- First, we are a community. I hope you sense that all the time. I know I do.
- Second, we are involved in community.

I am thankful, as I know you are, that the core value of community is played out in all sorts of way as we engage the community around us. There are very few instances during the week when people from the community around us aren't in our building. As I have heard often, *“The lights are always on at Saint John.”*

Our desire to reach out to those around us is borne out of our own sense of community. Community clearly expresses who we are and how we do life together. Just like Paul and the Philippian Church, we too are in partnership with one another, a partnership that has its foundation in Christ and expresses itself in a deep love for him and other people.

A Narrative Budget

Over the next couple of weeks, we will be considering our *“partnership in the gospel”* and the ways God is using us.

To no one's surprise we are entering a season of considering our financial stewardship. That's nothing to apologize for. Again, how we express ourselves in our giving reflects our devotion to Christ and his church. It also reflects what we think about our partnership together as we move toward the vision of *“making a difference by following Christ, offering hope, serving others, and loving everyone.”*

I am learning more about the power of a narrative budget, a budget that is not all dollars and cents, but an engine of sorts that helps us get to where we understand God wants us to be.

I will be talking about various aspects of our budget over the next couple of weeks that hopefully will give you a better idea about how the money given to this church is put to good use. This morning I wanted to talk about what on face value is the more mundane part of our budget.

Let's talk about our facility. Right at 25% of our Ministry Budget goes to support the building. That includes keeping it repaired, well-insured, cool in the summer and warm in the winter. It also includes the money we spend to pay those who clean and see to the upkeep of the building.

Ashlee sent me a podcast a few weeks back where the fellow sharing talked about how disingenuous it was to only talk about missions when you are trying to inspire people to give, particularly when so much is spent on facility. I am unashamed about the amount we spend on our facility. It would be one thing if the key was turned on the building at the conclusion of this service and not opened again the following Sunday.

Nothing could be further from the truth. As I said earlier, and you know it to be true, this building is open for ministry pretty much all the time. It was that way when I was here over twenty-five years ago, and it is that way today. So how do we fund the upkeep of this wonderful facility, which I consider not only God's gift to this congregation, but to our community?

- First, the on-going upkeep and maintenance of the building is supported by the Ministry Budget of the church, the very budget you will be asked to pledge your support to in a couple of weeks.
- Second, the more long-term repair and replacement is funded through either restricted or unrestricted reserves which the church has accumulated over the years.

This year alone we have replaced the roof, carpeted the education wing, upgraded our computer system to make it safer from being hacked, and have replaced one of our major HVAC units. The upcoming renovation of the Sanctuary will also utilize these funds.

In a word, when it comes to large capital expenditures, we are okay. In fact, we are better than okay. Trust me in that. No, trust God in that. God has been so good and will continue to be.

The rest of the narrative budget will seem a lot more exciting, because we have a lot of exciting things going on.

Carrying It to Completion

Paul writes to the Church in Philippi *"that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion."* I hold the enviable position of having served this church when it was just getting started. God began a *"good work"* in us then and will *"carry it on"* to the day Christ returns.

This I do believe. Do you? I think you do because you know who it is we serve.