

Order of Service & Talk for Sunday 29th August 2021

Call to worship

We fix our eyes on you Jesus, our Lord, our Saviour and King.

Come fill our hearts with your endless love and send the wind of your Spirit to blow
new hope through our lives.

Come light up our souls to rise in faith, to stretch out and take in your kingdom.
Come pour out your Spirit upon us as we stand together as brothers and sisters in the
Lord.

Come lift up our heads, brush away the shadows of guilt and shine your grace into our
minds.

And so Lord, we arise to worship. We shake off the shackles of a fallen world and join
with heaven to sing your praise. We will declare your goodness now and celebrate
your greatness forevermore!

Amen.

Song Men of faith rise up and sing (Martin Smith)

Song I give you all the honour (Carl Tuttle)

Prayer

Bible reading - Philippians 2:19 - 30 (Hugh Brenton)

Song Lord, I come to you (Geoff Bullock)

Sermon - Theme: Modelling the Christian faith

We all need people who are an example to us – people whose lives challenge us and encourage us in our walk with God. People that we look up to and aspire to be like. For the great apostle Paul, I think Barnabas would have been one of these people. After his Damascus Road experience, you probably know that Paul didn't go straight into preaching and planting churches – he went into the wilderness to try and process his experience of the risen Christ – because of that experience he had to completely recalibrate his theology and his way of life – but when he came back into the public arena Paul needed a Barnabas to pull him into the Christian fellowship and to offer him the hand of welcome and acceptance.

Maybe there's something there for us – who do you know that just needs that hand of encouragement that says, come back, we miss you?

Paul certainly learned a lot about grace and acceptance from Barnabas.

In today's passage, Paul gives us the examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus.

Timothy is almost certainly Paul's closest friend. Paul simply doesn't have anyone quite like Timothy – he is like Paul's right-hand man. When you read through all of

Paul's letters there is one name that keeps cropping up again and again – and it's the name Timothy – no less than 24 times, Paul refers to Timothy in his letters. And if you have your Bible open (which you should do) you will see that right at the start of this letter it is from Paul and Timothy servants of Christ Jesus. And here's something else – although I can't be 100% sure of this, I feel pretty sure that it was Paul who led Timothy to faith and is therefore his spiritual father. There are a number of verses that would suggest this, for example 1 Corinthians 4:17. Here's how it reads from the NLT, ***'That's why I have sent Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord. He will remind you of how I follow Christ Jesus, just as I teach in all the churches wherever I go.'***

We know that Timothy was taught the Old Testament Scriptures by his mother and grandmother – but they wouldn't have taught him about Jesus. Then Paul comes along, and Paul would just finish that whole equation for him. We can be sure that after Timothy came to faith that he and Paul enjoyed a very fruitful ministry and friendship. Together they wrote letters that are in the Bible and together they planted churches.

We actually know quite a lot about Timothy, but we know very little about **Epaphroditus**. In fact, he is only mentioned in one book of the Bible and so I think we know which one that is!

Someone said that Epaphroditus appears in Scripture but before you can get your tongue around his name he's gone. He's just one of those characters but I'm sure you are really going to appreciate him this morning.

Epaphroditus had a very different upbringing from Timothy. Epaphroditus is a pagan name, and his parents probably worshipped the goddess Aphrodite.

We don't know how he came to faith in Jesus. Perhaps it was in Philippi where one of the Christians invited him to church and shared the gospel with him – but we don't know for sure.

What we do know is that he understood that Jesus lived and died and rose again for him and he put his trust in him. And now he's in this church in Philippi where he has continued to grow in his faith and become highly respected.

Paul is in prison in Rome and the church are wanting to send him a love gift and also to receive news of how Paul is getting on, and the church leadership decide that the best person for this would be Epaphroditus.

So, I think we can learn a lot from Timothy and Epaphroditus this morning.

Look at verses 19 – 20, ***'I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare.'***

Ray Pritchard says that Timothy was Paul's FAT friend. And he's using fat as an acronym, Faithful, Available and Teachable.

God is never looking for people who are rich and beautiful and super intelligent, but he is looking for people who are going to be faithful, available and teachable.

Paul and Timothy were kindred spirits on the same wavelength.

Listen to how the Message puts verse 21, ***'I have no one quite like Timothy. He is loyal, and genuinely concerned for you. Most people around here are looking out for themselves with little concern for the things of Jesus, but you know yourself that Timothy is the real thing. He has been a devoted son to me as together we have delivered the message.'***

Paul is saying that there were some who were in the ministry for the wrong reason (that was true in Paul's day, and it is true today). Maybe they are looking for power or some kind of recognition but being in ministry is the exact opposite – it's about serving. And that's what Paul sees in Timothy. Timothy's stand out quality is that he genuinely cares about you. Timothy isn't looking for glory or recognition, he just wants to serve in God's kingdom.

I love this story about Joni Ericksen. Most of you will know Joni Ericksen's story. She had a diving accident as a teenager and broke her neck and ended up a paraplegic. This story is from the very early days when she was in hospital. She said she felt trapped inside her body that would no longer obey her commands – I can't imagine that – your brain says to do something, but your body doesn't react, but that's how she was.

She was lying on her bed and somehow found herself underneath her duvet cover and she couldn't move. She said she thought she was going to suffocate and just at that moment her best friend Jackie popped her head over the side of the bed.

She had crawled into her room avoiding the nurses at the desk – now, we all know what nurses at the desk can be like!!

Joni said that without a word Jackie sensed her panic and crawled into bed with her and lifted up her hands so she could see them. Then she quietly sang to her some of the great hymns of faith and prayed with her until her panic left.

I'll never forget our minister in Dundee. If you can imagine a city centre church with around 400 people each week. On one occasion there was a que of about 50 yards to get into church. Being a city centre church with a University meant that we attracted a large number of students, many of whom had come from places like Hong Kong and Singapore and various other countries. And after every service he would stand by the door and talk to every person - and he would remember all their names. I remember taking a friend with me from Glasgow where he was introduced to my minister for about 2 or 3 minutes and then he made a return visit some two years later - and guess what, my minister remembered his name and where he was from.

Just think, he had only spoken to my friend for a few minutes - and then think of all the thousands of people he had met over those two years and yet he still remembered my friend's name and where he was from.

That tells me something very important - it tells me that people mattered to him. He took a genuine interest in their welfare.

Timothy was like that in that he took a genuine interest in people.

What about Epaphroditus? (4)

It's been a few years since Paul was in Philippi, and now he is in prison in Rome but there's a really strong connection between Paul and the church, which is not surprising when we remember how the church began.

And now the church is desperate to know how Paul is doing and what they can do to help him because they love him so much and are indebted to him. They pull their resources together to provide a love gift for Paul.

(5) But Rome is around 700 – 800 miles away from Philippi and in those days that kind of journey could take up to 6 weeks.

(6) What do we know about Epaphroditus? Well, according to v25 Epaphroditus appears to be a messenger for the church at Philippi.

I don't know how common it was for people to have messengers - although we do know that Paul had his own personal messenger - does anyone know who that was? His name is Tychicus - which makes me think he was quite a small man.

Let's just look at a few verses that indicate Tychicus was Paul's messenger: Eph 6:21 - 22, Col 4:7 - 9, 2 Tim 4:12, Titus 3:12 (perhaps ask some people to read these verses) Just as Tychicus was a messenger for Paul, Epaphroditus appears to be a messenger for the Philippian church. Being a messenger and travelling from one place to another place would involve great sacrifice - it's not easy to have a wife and two kids when you're always on the move.

I wonder what kind of qualifications you would need to be a messenger?

- Would you need a degree in theology? No. I don't think so.

- Would you need to have a good education? Not necessarily.

- Would it be an advantage to be wealthy? Absolutely not.

- Would you need to have been a Christian for 30 years? Not at all.

Anyway, Epaphroditus agrees to make this long and perhaps dangerous journey so he can give this love gift to Paul as well as take care of his needs and then bring back news about Paul back to the church.

We know that Epaphroditus loves God, and he loves to serve the church but loving God and serving the church can often come at great cost.

It appears that somewhere along the way that Epaphroditus falls ill – seriously ill that he was close to death.

James Montgomery Boise says, Epaphroditus may have been delayed for up to 3 months because of his illness.

Now, there were no mobile phones, no Facebook or whatever and the church at Philippi are really worried – what’s happened to Epaphroditus, how is Paul, we love these men, but we haven’t heard any news for so long.

Epaphroditus does recover and eventually makes his way to Paul.

Epaphroditus doesn’t simply give Paul the gift from the church at Philippi but verse 25 says he was sent to take care of Paul’s needs. (7)

Was that physical needs? Spiritual needs – praying for him and with him? Or emotional needs – listening to Paul and encouraging him?

It reminded me of what Jesus said in Matthew Ch 25 (8) & (9)

Then Paul says let me write a letter because I want the church to know how grateful I am that you made this long journey and how thankful I am for their generous gift.

And Epaphroditus takes this letter that we have in our hands back to the church in Philippi.

If it wasn’t for Epaphroditus, we wouldn’t have this letter.

Now, this is the bit I’ve been most looking forward to sharing with you. From verse 26 Paul says this to the church at Philippi about Epaphroditus, ***‘He longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. Indeed, he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore, I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad, and I may have less anxiety. So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honour people like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.’***

I don’t know if you mark your Bible or not but if you then you might want to put a circle around the word ‘**risked**’.

‘He risked his life for the help you yourselves could not give me.’

(10) There is a lovely Greek word that is used to translate the word ‘risked’ – it’s the word parabolani. This is the only place in the whole of the Bible where you find this word.

And a literal translation of this word is to gamble. I can understand why translators don’t use this word in the Bible, but I can assure you that’s what it means. It comes straight out of the world of gambling.

It means to commit everything – to literally stake your very life – or we might say, to put all your eggs in the one basket or Christ and his kingdom.

He gambled it all – he staked everything – all his chips were on Christ.

In the early years of the church some Christians gambled so much that they got this nickname – they were known as the parabolani or the gamblers because they lived right on the edge and risked everything for Jesus. Faithful men and women who went into prisons – can you imagine what prisons were like back then?

They would visit the sick and even those with infectious diseases because they just loved them so much with the love of Jesus.

They could only give these people one name – the gamblers – because they risked everything on the promises of God.

And we all need something of that gambling spirit within us because it's so easy to have a Christianity that is safe.

Of course, this gambling spirit is seen throughout the Bible.

Think of Noah – he starts building this Ark and it's as if the whole world turns against him and they are laughing and mocking him.

But he continues to build, and he preaches repentance to a crooked and depraved generation.

Or what about Abraham – at the age of 75 God says pack your bags and go, just go and trust me on the journey.

Or think of Moses – God says I want you to go to the most powerful man on the planet (Pharaoh) and God says, just tell him from me, 'let my people go'.

Or think about Peter – I want to get out of the boat and start walking on water and he does it.

The parabolani – those who risked everything and staked everything on the promises of God.

This is the kind of faith that speaks up when it's much safer to remain silent.

The faith that goes when it would be much safer to stay.

The example of Timothy is that he was genuinely interested in people's welfare and wellbeing.

The example of Epaphroditus is that he put all his eggs in one basket for Christ and his kingdom whatever it cost.

Song Be thou my vision