

A Thought for Sunday 11th October

Based on Philippians 4:1-9

4 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!

2 I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. 9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

From the words of hymns, to prayers and blessings, this short reading is full of words and phrases that are familiar to us from our worship. These words have been drawn from and inspired many people in the last 2,000 years, and these short paragraphs still have much to offer us.

Paul was communicating with a full and growing church as he wrote this, and I wonder, as we stand in our cold churches, with a handful of others, or sit alone on our sofas, whether we ever feel we are someone's "joy and crown"? Someone loved and longed for? Who do people see when they look at God's church? Do they see Jesus here, in us?

Are we renowned for our gentleness, or do people stand alert when they meet us, fearful of a tongue lashing? Do we, in all things, present our requests to God, not a list of "I want" like a spoilt child but with thankfulness in our hearts?

Do we let that precious, precious peace of God wash over us, washing away anxiety, replacing it with action – with the exaltation of all that is true, noble, right, pure, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy? Is that what our faith means to us, and how we demonstrate it daily to others?

When we differ from one another, do we still join in one accord and rejoice in the Lord? That particular instruction is important enough for Paul to say it twice!

When we take our first steps into Christian faith, we are challenged to live a life that not only points others to Jesus, but *draws* them to him. A life that reflects the joy of knowing God, and the compassion that grows from understanding His love for us.

And as His children, we are challenged to put into practice all we have seen and heard and learnt, every day, secure in the knowledge we are loved. That we are God's joy and crown, and that His peace, which is beyond mere human understanding, guards our hearts and minds, eternally.



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