

Conflict, Joy, Wisdom

Series: Philippians

Date: 28 September 2025, 15th Sunday after Trinity

Location: St George's Battery Point

Texts: Proverbs 3:13-18; Luke 11:1-13; Philippians 4:1-9

What is your favourite food? One of my favourite meals to eat out with friends is the Chinese meal Yum Cha. I don't know whether you know it. It's a lunch time meal where lots of small portions of all sorts of different dishes are brought out on trolleys and you choose which ones you want to eat. You might choose the pork buns and prawn dumplings and the marinated squid. And, if you were really brave or you just wanted to make your friends squirm you could get the chicken feet.

Jesus says that "Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." It's my hope and prayer every Sunday as we gather together to hear God's word read and preached that God would feed us. This morning's text in Philippians presents us with a bit of a Yum Cha meal - we're going to sample 3 different dishes. **Conflict, Joy, and Wisdom**. So pick up your chopsticks and let's tuck in to the first dish.

Conflict. 4.2-3

I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. ³ Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

If you read through Philippians you will notice the warm tone of the letter. Paul has a great relationship with this church and his instructions to them are mostly along the lines of keep going! They are a healthy church, unlike say the church in Corinth. But 2 women in the church, Euodia and Syntyche, are in conflict and Paul wants them to sort things out. The main point I want to say here is that **conflict is a normal part of church life even in a healthy church**.

We'll explore this in a moment, but as a quick aside notice how Paul describes these women. They have contended at his side in the cause of the gospel and he calls them *fellow-workers*. This is one of those moments where the integral place of women in the life and leadership of the early church comes to the foreground.

But let's think about conflict in church for a moment. Some years ago I did a leadership development program called Arrow. One of the things we covered was Conflict Management. The guy running this segment said that churches are both prone to conflict and like avoiding conflict and both of those things mean that when it inevitably happens it's often big and nasty. So part of his advice to us was to prepare our churches for conflict by teaching on it. So, here we are!

¹ Matthew 4.4

As churches we often don't like conflict because we prize things like love and unity and peace very highly. And that means we can sit on conflict and suppress it until the pressure gets too great and then it explodes. But conflict is NORMAL. We should expect it because the Bible tells us that as human beings we are both finite and fallen. We're a diverse community and we all carry our own ideas, hang ups and wounds. That means we will inevitably rub up against each other. It's just like a marriage. A lack of conflict is not necessarily a sign of a healthy marriage. It may just be a sign that the couple aren't speaking to each other! The question is are we going to do conflict well or badly?

So let's have a look at a few helpful things this passage teaches us about conflict.

Paul pleads for Euodia and Syntyche to *be of the same mind*. It's Paul's plea from chapter 2. There he gives terrific advice for how to get to this point, namely humility.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.²

If we come into a conflict with an attitude of humility, considering others better than ourselves, looking to their interests as well as our own, we'll have a better chance of coming to the same mind. This attitude is of course imitating Christ's own humility. And indeed Christ is the basis and starting point for resolving the conflict - Paul pleads with these women to agree *in the Lord*. Christ is their common ground. And seeing the person we are fighting with *through him* will start to change our attitude. They are a person made in the image of God, whom he loves, for whom he died and all of this is his undeserved gift to them, *as it is to me*. Coming to the same mind *in the Lord* is also about putting Christ first. Subordinating your own agenda and preferences to Jesus and the gospel. Finally, Paul recognises that sometimes to resolve a conflict we need some help. Someone to mediate.

One of the very helpful tools that Arrow introduced me to to deal with conflict is to be able to break it down into its constituent parts. First there is the issue itself. Next there is the emotions and attitudes we bring to the issue in question. Then there is our behaviour, how the parties are treating each other. We can all manage our behaviour towards others. We can pause and recognise the attitudes and emotions that we're bringing to the issue, and then work to exercise self control there. The choices we make when it comes to our behaviour and our attitude will have a huge impact on whether the conflict is healthy and constructive or toxic and damaging. Do them well, and you will create a better environment in which to tackle the underlying issue. There's an organisation called PeaceWise that does Christian conflict resolution training. The Diocese invites them to do workshops for us each year, to help all our churches get better in this area. I highly recommend attending when the next one is on.

Issue + emotions and attitudes + behaviours > conflict

² Philippians 2.3-4

So, summary. Conflict is normal. Let's not avoid it. Instead, let's do it well!

Joy and Prayer

The next trolley is coming around with a second tasty dish - Joy. If you read Philippians you'll notice the word joy keeps cropping up. It's something that Paul wants the Philippian church to grow in. And they themselves give him great joy. But what stands out in this letter is that Paul can rejoice in the midst of his suffering. In 2.17 he writes,

But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. 18 So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

The first thing to say about joy then is that the Christian life ought to be one of joy. There ought to be a life and a lightness about us. Jesus is not a kill-joy and Christianity is not a kill-joy religion, although you'd be forgiven for thinking otherwise because we can get this badly wrong. Joy of course is something we all want. But that's the second thing. How can we get it? And how can we, like Paul, have joy in the midst of suffering? I know that's a very real and pressing question for many of you with the different circumstances you and those you love are in. Sickness. Sorrow. Relationship troubles. Difficulties in finances and work.

Well, Paul has an answer. It's there in verse 4, and it's something Paul puts into practice in his own life. *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!*

There's 2 parts to this. First *rejoice*, and second, *in the Lord*.

First, our feelings may go up and down with circumstances, but Paul tells us to rejoice because it is something that we can choose to do whatever the circumstances. A great example of this is Paul's own experience in Philippi. He and Silas were beaten up and put in prison. If there was ever an occasion not to rejoice, this would be it! But we read in Acts³ that while they were in prison they were praying and singing hymns to God. This has been something I've learned this year from some of you. That in the midst of hardship you have chosen to rejoice, to praise God and find your strength in him so that you do not despair.

The second part is that Paul doesn't just command a stoic smile in whatever the circumstance. He says, rejoice *in the Lord*. The object and source of our joy is the Lord. He is the pearl of great price. To know him, to know oneself to have been taken hold of by him, to know that he loves you, to know the hope of glory, well, these are the source of our confidence and joy. And the point is this - the more you meditate on Christ, one who he is, on what he has done for you, on his promises - the more you will find his joy. It does not mean you will be untouched by sorrow, but there will be a deep joy mixed in your tears.

³ Acts 16.16-34

Something very practical you could do to rejoice in the Lord is to take a leaf out of Paul's book and sing. The music plucks the strings of our hearts and the words lift them up to see the Lord and to find our joy and hope and strength in him. In Colossians Paul says that singing is one way in which the word of Christ dwells richly in our hearts. It's why Christians have always been a people of song. It's why we sing in our services. What songs do you know that you can sing to help you rejoice in the Lord whatever the circumstance?

The natural partner of that spiritual discipline of rejoicing is prayer.

And Paul's words here really don't need an explanation.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Our society experiences huge rates of anxiety. You may struggle with anxiety yourself. Here Paul tells us what we can do with our anxiety as Christians. Pray. Oh yes, get the psychological help you need. Take your meds. But for all of us, we can read this text and do what it says. Turn your worries into prayers. Instead of letting them bounce around in your mind snowballing into an avalanche, offer them to God. Leave them at his feet. Pray, "Lord, I'm worried about this, for these reasons, and it's really playing on my mind. Please look after this. Help me to trust that you're in control. Help me to leave this with you so I can do what I need to do today."

What did Jesus say in our gospel reading? Ask! You have a Father in heaven who knows what you need before you ask and delights to give good gifts to his children so Ask! Oh and while you're giving your worries to God, take a moment to thank God for some of his blessings to you. That's a great antidote to worry. What a great way to follow up listing your worries! Listing all the things you can thank God for. What a great way to start each day, giving thanks for God's gifts to you! And what is his promise?

the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Wisdom

The last trolley is coming around, I wonder what dish this will be?

Finally, sisters and brothers, 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. ² 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.

Here's Paul's second bit of wisdom when it comes to finding peace for your soul. Watch what you put into your mind. It's really, really simple. *You get out what you put in.* So, what are you filling your mind with? Is it good and wholesome and true? Is it filth that is going to poison your mind and your relationships? Now this is not to say that only Christian cultural production can go in. No, all good things come from God. But be discerning. I love fantasy novels. And I can remember as a teenager I was reading one particular series when I realised

that it was affecting me in ways I was not happy with. They were great stories, but I decided to put them aside. This is such a powerful word for us in the age of smart phones and social media. The algorithms are designed to keep us online, and they do that by playing to the desires of our flesh. Most obviously are porn, comparison and rage. Don't just let the algorithms run your life! We're all tempted, but scrolling for 2 hours is not a healthy way to rest!

And Paul's last piece of wisdom for today is imitate mature, godly Christians. You want to know how to live as a Christian. Well follow their example. And finally - put things into practice! Don't just be hearers of the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says!⁴

We've looked at some really practical stuff today about doing conflict well, about rejoicing in all circumstances, about prayer, about what you fill your mind with. Which of these is God calling you to put into practice? What is your plan to do that? Take some time to look through the passage and choose one thing to work on in response to God's word today.

Let me finish with a story. Joseph Scriven was born in Ireland in 1819. His life was marked by tragedy. In 1843 his fiancée drowned the night before their wedding. At the age of 25 he moved to Canada. In 1860 he fell in love, but again tragically his fiancée died from pneumonia. In 1855 he wrote a poem to comfort his mother in a terrible illness. We know it as the hymn "What a friend we have in Jesus".

What a friend we have in Jesus,
all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
all because we do not carry
everything to God in prayer!

2 Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged;
take it to the Lord in prayer!
Can we find a friend so faithful
who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness;
take it to the Lord in prayer!

⁴ James 1.22

3 Are we weak and heavy laden,
cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge--
take it to the Lord in prayer!
Do your friends despise, forsake you?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In his arms he'll take and shield you;
you will find a solace there.