

Order of worship for September 1, 2013, title, “Reaching Agreement”, text, Philippians 4:1-9,
Communion
Opening Song:

Welcome and Invocation: Psalm 32

Message Theme: To maintain peace in the church we must first of all maintain peace and an open heart with God

Worship Theme: Thanks that God is long-suffering in light of our weaknesses and generous in His wisdom so we can find ways to reconcile

Sunday Evening in the Word
The Christian and Worldly Authorities: 1 Peter 4:1-6
5:30 pm – 7:00 pm in the Church Library

Opening Song:
“Blessed Be Your Name” Overhead

Welcome

Invocation: Psalm 32

Special Music: “Trust in the Lord” by JoySong

Preparing the Heart in Song:
“Heaven Came Down” Song # 510
“I Know Whom I Have Believed” Song # 527

Offering and Offertory

Message: “Reaching Agreement”
Philippians 4:1-9 Pastor John Bronson

The Lord’s Supper
Song of Preparation
“Above All” Overhead
Invitation to the Supper
Prayers of Confession and Consecration
Distribution of the Elements

Closing Song:
“He Is Our Peace” Song # 614

Parting Word of Grace and Invitation to Prayer

Sunday Evening in the Word:
5:30-7 pm in the Church Library
The Christian and Worldly Authorities: 1 Peter 4:1-6

“The Prayer Closet”

September 1, 2013

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”
(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying that:

Joel and Virginia Cook: We give praise to God for the two new Clubs starting this September in Susanville and Red Bluff. Each club start means 100 more children and youth will hear the gospel perhaps for the first time. Please pray for our travel and for our Redding conference planning. We pray that the conference will strengthen and challenge each Awana Club in the region.

President Obama: the Spirit will renew his mind according the revealed truths of the Bible; the Lord will protect him from deceivers and people of low morals; the Father will use him as instrument for peace at home and in the world

OCS Faculty, students and support staff: that the Spirit works in the hearts of each group to promote mutual love, respect and understanding; the Lord awakens real excitement regarding the opportunity to teach and learn; the Lord effects positive communications and witness with the parents and guardians of the students

Military or Public Service Personnel of the Week: SMSgt. Tye Turner, Air Force (wife of Cathy): please pray for the troops of the 940th Security Police that are overseas, that they would be safe on their tour and return safely on September 24; that God would be with them and in their hearts; please pray for TSgt Daniel Curtis for his arm and shoulder injury

Young Adult of the Week: Sabrina Johnston, Butte College: taking one really hard class this year, then waiting to get into the nursing program, please pray for endurance and patience with her educational goals

Please pray for the health and recovery of our church family: Bob Boettcher, Carol Bernerd, Carol and Scott Koehler, Carole Lindsey, Dick & Jane Miller, Ellen McNabb, Joe Avery, Phil Peterson, Randy Bowen

(please call the office to request updates)

1.

[The title for today is] “Reaching Agreement”; the text is Philippians 4:1-9. It reads as follows.

(4:1) Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. (4:2) “I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. (4:3) Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

(4:4) “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. (4:5) Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; (4:6) do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. (4:7) And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

(4:8) Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (4:9) “What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”

Please pray with me: our Father as we come now to Your Word we trust we do so with the illuminating presence of Your Spirit to give us not just an accurate understanding but also a practical one, that is, an understanding that is worked out in the course of our daily lives. We thank You, Father, for this word, we thank You for your servant Paul who wrote it down. We thank You Father for your Holy Spirit who will now give us understanding. We pray these things in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Following general practice as indicated by the editors of the English Standard Version of the Bible by putting the first verse of chapter 4 at the end of chapter 3, I have agreed that when you shift from verse 1 to verse 2 of chapter 4 there is a [significant] change in topic. But even so verse 1 is a good transition into the topic that is about to be discussed. What is that transition? Paul is going to talk to his “companion” that he refers to [in verse 3] about bringing about unity, agreement. In order to do that, he is going to emphasize the need that his companion will be able to stand fast in the Lord.

Reflect with me for just a moment: have you ever been engaged in disagreement, division, faction, contention, the conflict of differing points of view? Now step back and take another look: did you ever decide to step forward and help a couple of people who were in conflict, contention, division, differing points of view? Ah! “Stand fast in the Lord!” That is the message that we need to gather in.

As is typical of Paul’s letters there is an emphasis on the application of Christian truth as we come towards the end of the letter. This sort of division is less clear in Philippians because he tends to be kind of practical all the way through in this letter, but still when we come to this section at the beginning of chapter 4, you will agree that it is highly practical in terms of how we are to conduct ourselves. Paul addresses someone there in verse 3 as “true companion.” If you follow the whole letter you realize the letter itself is written to the whole congregation of the Philippians, and it was particularly [addressed] to the elders and the deacons: that is going all the way back to the introduction. In the way of things in that day when very few people would have been able to have in their hands a text (this was a letter delivered), one particular individual would have been assigned the responsibility to read this letter to the rest of the congregation. That is likely the “true companion”, that is also most likely the man who most often taught from the pulpit and expounded the Word of God, so that is who Paul is appealing to.

Universally in the churches in the first age of the church all had plural leadership. Multiple elders were responsible along with deacons in guiding the life of the church. Only later on, when the churches began to grow dramatically fast both in size and number did administration become dominant in the life of the church. They began to have administrative pastors as such, and they were called “bishops”. Gradually, if you follow the history of the early

church, those bishoprics began to emerge and evolve and have responsibility over multiple churches and you had the elaboration of what we know as the Roman Catholic Church today, a highly structured organization that of course went in various ways.

Verses 2-7 in this letter are addressed primarily to “my true companion”, although they were also meant to be read to the whole congregation as I have read it to you, and therefore all of our ears should be listening. What does Paul want this true companion of his to do? He wants him to mediate between two ladies. Those ladies are Euodia and Syntyche. He wants those two ladies to agree or be reconciled in the Lord. The leader is to help them reach that happy condition. Paul doesn’t tell us what the problem is. That is significant. If the Spirit wanted us to know what the problem was between those two ladies, He would have told us. But on the other hand, if He didn’t want us to even think about the fact that the two ladies were in disagreement, He wouldn’t have mentioned it. So consequently he wants us to think about the things that cause us to disagree [as was the case with] these ladies. You see He set up an empty form: two people in the body don’t get along; they need help. We don’t know what their issue was so He is asking us to reflect on that aspect of the life we share together in Christ.

So we are encouraged to think about situations in which disagreement or a division becomes an offense of some sort, an offense such that there is a disruption in the fellowship of the local church, and more specifically amongst the volunteers who are the chief players in the church. That is what this is about. A little background or context is helpful as we think about this. Who are these ladies? We have a remarkable description of these ladies if you pay attention to the passage. He says they are, first off, members, members of the church. They are active in its ministries. Secondly they are sisters in Christ. Thirdly they are dedicated workers. Paul is highly complimentary of these two women, of who they have been and what they have done. He is deeply appreciative of them. Beyond that notice that he indicates that their names have been written in the Lamb’s Book of Life, so we can entertain no suspicion that these are perhaps a couple of ladies that slipped in and got involved and are not actually saved, not having the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit: that would be an unreasonable conclusion in light of all of what Paul has to say to us, which has been inspired by the Holy Spirit.

So what possibly could have happened to cause or bring these two ladies to a place of such disagreement? Let us go a bit a further in understanding something about the difficulty that has now emerged. These women are saved by grace, of course. They are therefore sinners snatched from death. They know, surely, that the life they have in Christ is a gift; forgiveness is freely given to us from the Lord. So what can the issue be? What you want to do is you keep piling on an understanding of our identity in Christ, who we are in Christ. That is a fair description of both Syntyche and Euodia. So we think, “My goodness!”

Can we step inside that narrative? Could we in this room fill in alternate names for these two servants, names of our acquaintance? That, of course, is what we want to do; what we ought to do if we are going to give application.

Paul asked that ladies will agree in the Lord. That is not a light comment, because the essential thing to remember at all times is that our unity is in Christ. That is where our unity is. We are not unified because we are white middleclass Americans. We are not unified because we all happen to live in Oroville. We are not unified because we all took a shower this morning. We are unified because we have a common faith in Jesus Christ. That is the point and place and definition and substance and reality of our unity. We support and encourage one another in the faith.

Perhaps, when we think about these ladies, they are at odds over some aspect of the faith. Think about that! Could that be the case? Have you ever known people to get into an argument over doctrine or practice? Have you ever known anyone to get into an argument over baptism: who, when, where, how? How about whether or not you do your morning devotions correctly? How about whether or not you worship by being Presbyterian or wildly charismatic idiots? I have named these common sources of “discussion” and haven’t even mentioned tongues yet!

There are other matters that divide people, putting them at odds with each other. For instance, where should the hemline be [on a girl or woman’s dress]; standards of modesty? Or, some people have really powerful opinions about how to run the kitchen! On the other hand please notice gentlemen that I have included an explanatory parenthesis. This is an issue of stewardship. How do we best take care of the things that have been entrusted to us? Do we ever get at odds over those things?

There are other issues that move in somewhat different directions. For instance there are matters of church leadership. Perhaps whether or not this should include or exclude the husbands of Syntyche and Euodia. Or an area that is more challenging is whether or not a woman can teach, or what she can teach, or who she can teach. Are these sources of contention, do people get at odds over these things? There is, of course, the question that the Children’s Ministries Director needs to answer and that is the curriculum: what is being taught to whom? In addition to that there would be the question of the age at which children could begin to sing in the choir. Did people ever contend over that? Or perhaps whether or not it is appropriate for a woman to breastfeed her baby, and where; or is it ok for women to work outside the home; or which version of the Bible should we use? It is perfectly obvious what I am doing; I am listing out those topics of discussion which in my experience have occasioned offense, and I wonder if that is true in your experience or not?

If we now drop back into the passage, Paul wants this church leader, his true companion, to intervene and help these ladies to agree together in the Lord. Let me ask the question again; how many of us have tried? How did it go? Hmm. Arguments, contentions, being at odds, having differing points of view: oh that is dangerous territory, particularly for people in the church who believe they are divinely inspired in their point of view.

Verse 3: “...*help these women who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Lamb’s Book of Life.*” How precious are these women? [They are] eternally precious! To be handled, therefore, with infinite care, recognizing that the blood of Christ has been shed for them, and therefore they are not to be handled lightly nor treated trivially but to be respected fully as those who are the servants of the Living God.

Now we come back to it, don’t we? What does Paul say? He says that the first thing you need is you need to stand fast in the Lord. That is what you need. You need to know their identity in Christ and you need to know your identity in Christ so that you are not blown out of the water. He needs to know the ground he stands on. Our personal passions tend to dim as we contemplate the great passion of the Lord: His death for our sins in order that we would escape the world of sin and guilt and fear and anger and learn to walk in love. That is the contrast. So the man who is going to step – applying equally to a woman – any person who is going to step in and seek to be a mediator between those who are at odds, that person needs to know the principles and the means and the steps for reconciliation in Christ. A good place is to go and read with care Matthew 18, or perhaps for a little larger theological perspective 2 Corinthians 5:11-21. It is essential if you are going to mediate that you not become caught in the ebb and flow of the passions of the people who are at odds. It is essential that you not get drawn in personally in the conflict: you must stay removed and not embroiled, because in the contest that tends to erupt when differences of opinion become offenses, ideas and opinions are then laden with resentments and suspicions and all the various protests of wounded pride. You need to know how to stand your ground, therefore. This is why the verse at the very beginning, verse 1, is in fact an excellent introduction to this whole topic: “*Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.*”

As we move on to verses 4-7 we should keep the context. It is very easy in reading these verses – “*Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice...*” – to read them out of context. They speak so eloquently to the general conduct of our lives; they are wise ones to take up and say, “Oh yeah, I want to be a spirit of joy and gladness in all situations”! But it is also helpful, in fact, essential to remember that these verses are given in the context specifically

of mediating amongst those who are at odds. Therefore we need to have instruction if we are going to engage in that mediatorial role. They are, in other words, given first of all as a means for our arming our minds.

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Rejoice: you have Syntyche in this hand and you have Euodia in this hand, and they can hardly look at each other. But you are to rejoice. You are to be between them with the love of God. You are to let that love pour out of your heart and flow over them so they can be healed. Notice, you are to be reasonable. The essence and the heart of your reasonableness is that you know that the Lord is right there, He is there! As you lift up your prayers and supplications you lay aside your anxiety – “Am I going to get these two women to agree? Am I going to help them cease to argue? Am I going to help them cease to be locked into their particular point of view, unyielding, unwilling to give an inch? Is there hope here? (Have we ever been there?) Don’t despair. Focus your heart and mind not on the women, or the contending parties, but on the Lord. If you don’t, you will be ripped apart!

In the Sunday evening study in I Peter we spent some time thinking through the business of arming ourselves for being fruitful and effective as God’s servants. Peter wrote (I Peter 4:1), *“Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin...”* Paul offers essentially the same counsel to the companion who is going to work with these two women to help them agree in the Lord. What is essential for us to grasp is that we arm ourselves in order to stand fast. In an earlier message I made this observation. Passivity is not a Christian virtue. Standing fast is not to be confused with “standing around”. We tend to be highly skilled at standing around. We are not necessarily skilled at standing fast. What is the difference? People who are standing around are just waiting for something to happen. But people who are standing fast are defending their position. If you are arming yourself in order to meet the challenge of helping people who are at odds with each other come to agreement again, then you need to be arming yourself before you walk into the situation so that you are firmly fixed on Christ, you know what needs to be accomplished through the working of His Holy Spirit.

What he says is that we are to rejoice. It is a command. We are to choose joy over any other option. The choice is just set there in front of us! In such a situation joy is a state of mind, not of emotion: it is a state of mind. Joy is not a state of being for most adults. Joy is a way of engaging life; it engages life from the perspective of the triumph of Jesus over sin and death and the certainty of eternal life thereafter. Most adults are no longer joyful. Children are joyful; adults have learned not to be because they have suffered disappointments, betrayals, broken dreams and broken people bringing pain into their lives. After you have endured a certain amount of pain you become highly guarded, and part of the guarding is that you enclose your pain inside yourself and you build a wall of protection because if somebody pokes through the wall it finds and resonates with the indwelling pain. You don’t want that to happen so you put on another layer and another layer and another layer [of self-protection]. What Paul says through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is that we are to choose joy. When we choose joy, by fixing our hope and our attention on all that Christ has done, as that occurs that wall will begin to fall away and you will be able to listen to those who are in pain around us and who are arguing with each other as a means of expressing their pain.

Choosing joy is not a light or casual or simply spontaneous decision: “I think I will be happy today!” That won’t work; either Satan or God will set something up for you to hit your toe. When you double over in pain and have a few expressions to explain to others what you think about the situation, you will say to yourself, “Man, what happened to joy?!” So just deciding to be a happy soul will not pull it off. That is not what is being recommended. Christian joy requires adopting a Christ centered and gospel instructed view of life. This is a perspective on living that affirms the reality of forgiveness. It affirms the possibility of renewal. It rests in the certainty of eternal life. I don’t know about you, but in occasions when I have intervened amongst people who are at odds, I find that I am

often the object of their angry arrows. Oftentimes I find that I am suddenly the accused and guilty one; that the anger which they had for one another suddenly has found a new focus. Now the question is, will I be reasonable? Will I rest fully in the certainty of God’s love and forgiveness? Will I be capable to continue to pour out Christ’s love on these people rather than throwing up my wall, responding in anger, giving voice to my pain and leaving them ruined, because now I am in retreat? Believe me, beloved, putting on Christ’s joy is not a light or easy thing. It is a serious undertaking.

To “rejoicing” we see that Paul adds “reasonableness”, “forbearance”. The joy we have in the Lord does not manifest itself in a kind of giddy ignoring of reality or the pretense that the sorrows and difficulties of life are not real. They are very real. Christian joy is not a fantasy that salvation is a personal privilege for the believer ensured by Jesus and excusing us from what other people cannot avoid. God does save us to avoid difficulty, pain and suffering. Indeed it is the contrary. If we are going to follow Christ then all you have to do is read the Gospels and figure out what He went through. What He went through was suffering in order to capture the heart of those who live in pain. We are increasingly in a society where the people who we are in contact with are in ever deepening levels of pain. The reason they are is that they are at ever greater distances from Jesus Christ and they no longer know, they just don’t know. So if we are serious about being God’s servants and drawing people from the world into the life of Christ that we share together we must be prepared to deal with people who are in pain. People who are in pain will be at odds with each other, in addition to the fact that most of us figure out how to do that ourselves now and then.

That carries us down to the last of the emphases that we find in this passage about how to be an effective mediator: reaching agreement. Our lives center in Christ and in the victory that He has accomplished on our behalf, not in the world or our standing in it. This is brought into focus in the next two verses. Paul directs his reader to the centrality of prayer. What is prayer? The way that Paul presents it is that prayer is the antidote to anxiety: “*Be anxious for nothing...*” How many of us had an anxious moment last week? Ah! Right! “*Be anxious for nothing...*”, so how do we handle that anxiety? It doesn’t say you will never be anxious. It says when anxiety comes there is a recourse, a direction, an action, a discipline, a way you can handle this reality. It is to pray. An antidote to anxiety: by means of prayer every believer brings to God every issue that she faces, every fear which weigh him down, every doubt that gnaws at assurance, every feeling of inadequacy and dependency, uneasiness, uncertainty; every dread of failure, of mockery or scorn, every hope for joy, every longing for love and acceptance: all of these are laid down before the Lord. They are entrusted to His care. All of this is done with thanksgiving. It says to pray with thanksgiving. The thankful heart is the one that remembers the blessing of the Lord from times past and carries that memory into the midst of present reality. “Will the Lord who has triumph over murderous hatred and death fail now to keep the one for whom He died and rose again from the grave?” The discipline of rejoicing, prayer, remembering and thanksgiving, will, Paul says, put you in the way of God’s peace. This is the peace of which Jesus spoke to His disciples in John’s Gospel: “*My peace I give you, not as the world gives to you, in the world you have tribulation, but I have overcome the world.*” [John 14:27] Paul says this peace surpasses all understanding or comprehension. He is not saying that this is an irrational peace. This is a peace that allows the believer to be reasonable or rational even in the midst of the ebb and flow of the irrational feelings and arguments of those who are at odds. We should appeal [to God] for that [inner peace and reasonableness]. We should ask for that. If you are in the midst of an argument; if you are trying to help a couple of other people or perhaps work out a contention on a board or a committee, if you are involved in that situation and you are trying to be a bringer of peace and mediation, then my suggestion is that you make it your business that you invite that who company to prayer that we might come into the presence of the Lord and allow the Lord God to again be primary in our understanding.

In verse 8 it says that we are to choose [what we think about] carefully and wisely with a view to the end we have in mind. Paul emphasizes the need for harmony and unity in the faith as being more important than almost anything

else that was being dealt with. Winning a law suit against a fellow believer is a loss for the kingdom of God. In I Corinthians 6:1-3 he talks to a bunch of Christians. He [asks], “What are you guys doing? You are going to law against one another? It is better to lose the case than to win it!” The peace of God calls us away from the field of human contest and into the presence of Jesus. So one of the things you have to do if you are going to mediate a conflict is you have to say to yourself, “My job is not to win. I am not here to out-smart, outmaneuver and out-talk each of these people. I am here to help them to come into the presence of the Lord. Therefore I can accept any degree of their anger and abuse as long as we are moving towards reconciliation in Christ, because that is the goal. If they end up turning away from me and walking off with one another, my standing is not determined by their opinion of me; my standing is determined by Christ’s love for me, and that is where I must stand.

“Finally, brothers...”, Paul closes the section of the letter. To the Ephesians Paul wrote that it was necessary that they not continue to live in the futility of their minds as the Gentiles do. Rather, he says, we are to choose carefully and wisely with a view to the end we have in mind. What this means is that we need to live intentionally. That is what it means to arm ourselves. That is what it means when we say, “Ok, I am going to get up today; and when I get up I am going to put my feet on the ground, and I am going to remember: I am standing on the rock of Jesus Christ. That is what I am doing. When I enter into a workplace, when I enter into a conversation, when I enter into any situation I enter in as the servant of Jesus Christ. I have armed myself. I am prepared. I am intentional. I am not going to let myself be swept away by other peoples’ emotions. I will remain focused on the Lord Jesus Christ. I will remember.”

My observation is that generally we are undisciplined in our minds. We are not sober, which is often mentioned in scripture. We let passing things attract and hold our attention. We crave stimulation. We are restless. We are often mentally bored. We are not, in that situation or condition, standing fast; on the contrary we are just standing around. Who can deny that the natural tendency in us all is to think of things alarming, troubling, evil, tempting, and every source of sorrow and grief and wickedness of humanity rather than choosing to focus on that which is true and honorable and just and pure and lovely and of good repute or any form of excellence. Instead we allow our hearts to follow our mind which which draws into the general flow of garbage that is pumped out at us by our media. Paul’s counsel is that we fill our minds with the truth of God, that we remember the acts of grace that God has performed, that we meditate on the evidences of His wisdom, majesty and power that are everywhere found in the creation, and that we are to reflect on the beauty and goodness of what has been made. That is what is being offered to us. So I would have you consider, how do you occupy your minds? Do you arm yourself with Christ? Are you prepared to be an instrument of His grace, even with those who are at odds with each other.

As we prepare now to celebrate the communion together, may the word of God resonate in our hearts and minds. May it draw us to a common focus on Jesus Christ. May we be glad in His goodness. May we be mindful of His forgiveness. May we be eager to enter His presence and to enjoy that presence in all that we do.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. All of us have experienced disagreements with others in the church as well as our families and amongst friends. In your experience, what are the most common causes of disagreement?

2. Disagreements need not and should not cause a disruption in our lives, but they can. What is it that brings a disagreement to the place where it disrupts our relationships?

3. Reflecting on the list of things in slide #4 which the two women in Philippi shared, how could those women have allowed something to neutralize their unity in Christ?

4. Slides # 6 and #7 indicate some of the things which have led to disagreement and disruption in various churches. Which of these seem most likely as a source of difficulty to you?

Which of these seem the most silly or unnecessary?

5. What do you do to arm yourself for the challenges of daily living? Would you do anything else or more to prepare for helping to resolve a dispute or reconcile a disrupted relationship?

6. Are you a joyful person? Is this a matter of disposition or of choice? What does it mean to “rejoice in the Lord”?

7. Slide 14 indicates some of the life issues that can and should be brought to the Lord in prayer. Do you bring these kinds of issues to the Lord in prayer? What are the most frequent topics in your prayer life?

8. Jesus said He would give us His peace, but peace in our lives often seems fragile at best. What are the things which most often rob you of peace? What works for you to reestablish peace in your life?