

Sunday 1st October – Reflective Worship
Philippians ch 4

Our short journey through Paul's letter to the Philippians comes to an end today. We said at the outset that this letter is different from Paul's other letters in that it is warm and encouraging; it contains none of the criticisms present elsewhere and it shows Paul in a very different light. The Church in Philippi were certainly very fond of Paul and he they.

We have seen and talked about some of the wide range of issues covered in the letter – suffering, death, unity, humility, the example of Jesus himself. Today we come to the final chapter, and like many final chapters of Paul's letters much of it is personal encouragements and messages, but there are some thoughts we can take to heart.

So lets have a look in particular at verses 6 to 9.

Do not worry 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.

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

This time last week we were away walking along the line of Hadrians Wall. Times away like that give an opportunity to leave behind all our anxieties and troubles, to enjoy the moment, to appreciate the beauty and wonder of the world around us, to relax and find refreshment. Of course, for you it may not be walking that gives you that chance – it may be relaxing by a pool or looking around National Trust properties or looking after the garden or whatever. The important thing though is to get away from the regular routine things of life.

But those worries and concerns don't go away. Personal worries, national ones and global ones. The world isn't mended by our taking time out. We have to come back to reality.

And I think its this that Paul is trying to address here. The tension between the things that drag us down and the things that give us life; between things that are life draining and those that are life enhancing. And how the way we think – the attitudes we have - can help us become positive influences.

When we look at the TV news or read the newspapers we can get overwhelmed by the bad and the sad. The murder of a young woman as a result of ever escalating knife violence in London; more than 100 people dying in the fire at a wedding in Iraq; attacks on Mosques in Pakistan; the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine; the effects of climate change as shown in extreme weather events ; the biodiversity loss highlighted in this week's State of Nature report to name but a few things in the news at the moment.

And I guess we often feel powerless and helpless. What can we do when there is so much pain and suffering; when the issues are so large; when it seems that there is nothing we can do to influence or change things?

Paul in our chapter tells us to take our worries to God in prayer – and I am sure we all do that. But if you're anything like me you will be saying – *but what can I do??* A feeling that prayer, however important, is not enough by itself. Perhaps our view of prayer needs expanding – and I hope over the next 4 or 5 weeks as we preach Sunday by Sunday in all three churches on the Lord's prayer this is something that will happen.

Maybe Paul's further advice here about our attitude to life gives us the clue we need to what we can do; how we can begin to make a difference or be the difference.

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Paul here is essentially talking about having a positive attitude; focussing on the good and not the bad; seeing possibilities and not hurdles.

When I began thinking about these words my initial thoughts were to say that this kind of attitude is the kind of attitude we might have or desire when on holiday, when we remove ourselves from all the pressures; when we put "real life" on hold for a week or two. But as we've said before, we have to come back to reality and face the truths of the world again. So is it possible to have this kind of attitude when we are the midst of our daily routine, with our worries and concerns and the world's worries and concerns on our mind? Can we be positive in a world that seeks to drag us down into the mire?

A couple of examples that I have come across this last week might help

One of the things we mentioned in the blog we wrote of our wee walk was the lantern initiative at Newcastle Cathedral. The leadership of the cathedral has a real desire to reach out to those on the edges of society; to make a difference. So when the café in the cathedral opened again after the lockdown they began to employ released prisoners and to have others on work experience while on day release from prison. They also came to an arrangement with the prison bakery – where prisoners are learning a trade that will help them lead better lives when released – to supply all breads and cakes to the café. Of course they are not solving the whole world's problems, but by doing simple, small things they are beginning to make a difference rather than just saying 'there is nothing we can do'.

I went to an information evening on Wednesday where the Diocesan Director of Mission Support was talking about youth work in churches. The temptation for me here in Shirley is to say we don't have any youth work. We don't have the resources and we don't have any real contact with young people. The whole idea of youth work is too big for us to even think about. But he urged us to think small; to consider the few links we have and think about how we can take small steps to build better and deeper relationships with those few young people we do have contact with. He gave an example of a parish who have a Messy Church (like ours) where some of the older children – 9 or 10 year olds - are beginning to lose interest (like ours). This parish had seen a need, had realised that they might be able to do something small and had set up a monthly Sunday

afternoon drop in for hot chocolate in the local Costa. Now, several months on, numbers are better than they had hoped and real relationships were being formed with the youngsters.

Two stories about thinking positively and using that positive thinking to begin to make a small difference.

We also heard this morning in our Harvest service about small things we can do as we fight against climate change – modifying our diet; being careful with using water and other resources and so on.

The voices in the world around us – perhaps largely media driven – are negative – always out to bring people down, to tell the bad news stories, to shock and to make us despair. And they have their effect. They create a “what’s the point” and a “what can we do” mentality. A mentality which encourages us to imagine that things were better in the past and can never be good again.

Paul urges the opposite – to concentrate on the good and wholesome, the true and the praiseworthy. The things that give us hope and open the door to possibilities. Think about these things, he says. And as we do we will – I am sure - begin to see how the world can be changed and what part we can play.

Reflection

play some music

as we think of examples we have come across where a small act has made a difference

and light a candle of hope for each one