

Reading: Philippians: 4: 1-9

It's been one of those weeks that has been both challenging and hard going. You are probably all too familiar with such weeks at the moment. No sooner have you got over one thing than another is at your door. The news is mainly bad so I'm limiting how much I listen to. It can feel like we are walking through treacle with it getting stickier by the minute and with no end in site. I wonder how you are feeling today?

Our reading today from Philippians has those famous lines 'Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice!' Well Paul, you obviously haven't lived through a pandemic and haven't the faintest idea what we are all going through! How can we possibly rejoice when things are so difficult at the moment? What is there to give thanks about?

Paul may not have been witnessing a pandemic but he was writing from prison. It seems odd therefore that he is telling a church to rejoice – to give thanks, to celebrate. What is there possibly to celebrate at the moment? Paul, even in prison, found much to give thanks for and is writing to remind the church to do the same. As we read this letter to the Philippians we learn how Paul could rejoice despite the difficult circumstances he found himself in. He

didn't rejoice because of the circumstances but despite them. He rejoiced in the Lord.

Paul rejoices for several reasons:

- for his brothers and sisters in Christ, for his fellow believers (Phil 1:3) It's great isn't it to know that we worship God with others. We don't worship or serve on our own but in the company of friends and spiritual saints. He gives thanks that they are growing in their relationship with Jesus and becoming more like Him every day. Who do we rejoice with as they grown in faith? I've been privileged to lead a couple of Alpha courses recently and it's wonderful to see people's faith and understanding grow.
- that the good news of Jesus continues to be preached (Phil 1: 18). How blessed we are to live in a country where we are free to tell others about Jesus and free to tell our stories. Who are using this privilege to bless? Who are you thankful for that shared the good news about Jesus with you?
- that his fellow believers are becoming more Christ-like every day. He sees them gain comfort from Jesus and experience Christ's tenderness and compassion (Phil 2:2). Are you experiencing the love and compassion of Jesus in your live right now that you can praise Him for?

- that despite the sacrifices and hardships it is all worthwhile because others are coming to faith in Jesus (Phil 2:18). The sacrifices that we make in serving Jesus make a difference to the lives of others. Are there people whose lives you are making a difference to? Not just our family and neighbours, but are there charities and missionary organisations that you support that are making a huge difference to people's lives. As you sacrifice your time, energies and finances, what can you thank Jesus for the difference this is making?
- of the joy of believing in Jesus. He gives thanks for all that Jesus has done for Him – how Christ had mercy on Paul, a sinner, forgave him his sins and called him to serve. Paul rejoices because every sacrifice he has made has been worth it for the sake of his love for Jesus. He knows that whatever he has lost in this life, Jesus will more than make up for in this next life.

Paul has learnt that rejoicing is about our inner attitude and not our external circumstances. He was full of joy not because of the situation he found himself in but his joy was in the Lord and all that Christ had done for him. He knew that no matter what happened to him Jesus was with him. The Lord was near.

When things are tough and challenging it's really hard to give thanks to the Lord. But it is through giving thanks that we find our spirits raised and our strength renewed. We experience the peace that only Jesus can give and we receive his encouragement. It can be really helpful to tell others what we are thankful and grateful for because as we do this it helps others to be reminded of how Jesus is at work.

Our hope during this difficult days continues to be in the Lord Jesus who knows our circumstances and the situations we are in. He knows the beginning and the endings. We can trust Him to journey with us and to be in the middle of all that is going on. Jesus wants us to bring everything in prayer to Him – all our worries, anxieties and fears but also to give Him thanks and praise for His presence with us and the peace He gives us. Pray today that the Lord will fill you with His peace and give you a joyful heart despite all the challenges that we are daily faced with. Amen