

**Opening prayer**

**Call to worship**

The Lord reigns, let the earth be glad  
And distant shores rejoice  
You who spoke this world in motion,  
Breathed life into each creature,  
Painted landscapes, in colourful hues,  
You are our God.

The Lord reigns, let the earth be glad  
And distant shores rejoice  
You who bring to us each season  
Light and warmth, rain and sunshine,  
And within the seed a spark of life,  
You are our God.

The Lord reigns, let the earth be glad  
And distant shores rejoice  
You whose love is beyond measure  
And stretches throughout time,  
From a garden in Eden, to Gethsemane and beyond,  
You are our God

The Lord reigns, let the earth be glad  
And distant shores rejoice

**Song** Come people of the risen king

**Song** Rejoice the Lord is king

**Prayer of intercession** Jill Walker

**Bible reading: Philippians 1:1 – 11** read by Carol Gibson

**Song** Jesus put this song into our hearts

**Sermon**

Fellowship goes beyond friendship

I came across this story about an Anglican chaplain by the name of David Knox. Back in 1944 he served in the Royal Navy, and he was in one of the ships preparing for D-Day and the invasion of Normandy.

And as a chaplain of the ship, he noticed that everybody on board the ship, regardless of their age or their rank – they were absolutely focussed on one thing. The success of their mission.

He said no-one was thinking about their own needs or interests, but they worked together as a team.

And Knox said, just prior to D-Day he remembered thinking to himself that despite all the dangers that lay ahead, he had never been happier.

I think that's quite difficult for you and I to understand - he was about to face a situation where he might end up losing his life and yet he had never felt happier.

Later on, after the war and reflecting on his own experience, he said, '**we gave ourselves to a shared objective – human friendship is a wonderful thing, but fellowship goes beyond friendship.**'

Many of you will be familiar with J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings. The first of the three books is called, The Fellowship of the Ring and that's where we get to meet a team of 9 very different people. They prove to be an amazing team, but they couldn't be more different.

There are 4 hobbits – you all know what hobbits look like – they are funny little guys with big hairy feet.

The Hobbits are called Frodo Baggins, Merry, Sam and Pippin.

Then you have 2 warriors who are always dressed for battle, Boromir and Aragorn. And later on, Boromir goes on to give his life for the Hobbits.

And then there's this elf called Legolas.

And then we have a dwarf called Gimli who is just this angry little guy who always seems to be carrying an axe.

And then we have the wizard called Gandalf.

Why do I even mention them? Because they were an amazing team who were all bound together by a common purpose, which was to defeat the forces of darkness and yet they couldn't have been any more different from each other.

To me, that sounds very much like what the church should be and what the church at Philippi actually was

Okay, let's get straight into our passage and hopefully we will get a sense of the fellowship between Paul and the church at Philippi even though they are separated from each other physically.

**I have you on my mind (or on my heart).**

***It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you on my heart (v7).***

So, it's as if when Paul is writing this letter that he simply can't stop thinking about the church in Philippi.

I suppose what is remarkable is that Paul is not thinking about himself but about others.

Humanly speaking Paul should be depressed or down in the dumps as we used to say.

He has no wife, no family, no home, no church and no freedom because he's stuck in prison despite his innocence and so there's also no justice, yet he is filled with an incredible joy when he thinks of the church at Philippi because of their fellowship in the gospel.

So, Paul is sitting in prison, awaiting death. I imagine he's lonely, that he's probably hungry and hurting and yet he begins his letter with these words

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***'I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.'***

When we read these words, I think the questions that begs to be answered is 'how?'

How can Paul even speak about joy in these circumstances?

I can only speak for myself but if it was me in that prison cell, I'm pretty sure I wouldn't be speaking about joy.

Well, here's the key and it's so important that we take this on board – joy is not so much an emotion as it is a lifestyle.

And it can be so easy to forget that because life just crashes upon us, but that's what Paul wants to convey to us.

If joy was simply an emotion or a feeling, then when times are hard, we would be bereft of joy.

If joy was a feeling or an emotion then where does this joy come from that Paul speaks about in this letter – because he should be miserable and depressed – but he's not, because he understands this truth that joy is a lifestyle. And because joy is not a feeling or an emotion it also means that tough times can't rob us of joy.

Does that mean Christians should be happy and smiling all the time?

Perhaps you remember singing the song, 'I'm H A P P Y, I know I am I'm sure I am, I'm HAPPY.'

If you sing that often enough you might just convince yourself.  
And then you read the Bible and you discover a much more mature perspective on joy.

We are to rejoice with those who rejoice but we are also to weep with those who weep.

In the book of Isaiah, Jesus is described as a man of sorrows.

Many of the Psalms in the Old Testament are songs of lament which have very dark threads running through them.

In other words, you don't have to pretend that your H A P P Y.

Why, because joy is a lifestyle that includes sorrow and pain and all the bleak things that happen to us. Joy is a lifestyle that can take these things on board without being overcome by them.

So, joy is a lifestyle. That is true but it's incomplete. Joy is a lifestyle that celebrates the forward progress of the gospel. Again, I think that is so important.

Paul is saying I'm not joyful about my suffering but I'm joyful that the gospel is going forward.

I'm hurting, but the gospel is advancing. I'm coming to the end of my days and my ministry is almost over – I'm not particularly happy about that, but people's lives are being changed and that gives me great joy.

And that's how it was for Paul and the church at Philippi. He says, ***'In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.'***

And so, Paul can't get this church out of his mind.

And I love the way Paul puts it in verse 7 when he says, ***'it is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart.'***

It feels like Paul is metaphorically putting a big arm around this whole congregation at Philippi – and he says, ***'all of you.'*** In fact, he uses that same phrase in verse 4 and again in verse 8.

So, he has no favourites in this congregation.

There are no cliques. There's no-one that he picks out as being above the others. And there are no exceptions.

The church at Philippi is clearly very close to Paul's heart – he takes great delight in it, and it brings him great joy.

Bill Hybels has this to say about churches like the Philippian church, ***'when we let the love of Christ flow through us to each other in the local church,***

**Masks come off**

**Conversations go deeper**  
**Hearts get vulnerable**  
**Accountability is invited**  
**Tenderness grows**

In a church where this kind of love abounds people become like brothers and sisters. It's little wonder that Paul has this church on his heart. People should be banging on the church doors saying let me in because I want some of what you've got – but sadly their not.

**Secondly, he holds them in his prayers.**

Paul has already said that he always thanks God when he prays for the Philippian believers.

And in verse 9 onwards he says, ***'And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.'***

Warren Wiersbe said, ***'that perhaps the deepest Christian fellowship and joy we can experience in this life is at the throne of grace – praying with one another and praying for one another.'***

I think the Christians in Philippi would have been hugely encouraged just to hear the apostle Paul saying, ***'you are in my prayers, I'm praying for you day after day after day.'***

And what I love about Paul is not only that he prays for them but he tells them he's praying for them. Again, I think that is a huge encouragement. If your praying for someone then tell them your praying for them and I can assure you they will be so blessed to know that.

Over the years I have had one or two people come to me and they have said, ***'I pray for you every day'***.

I find that deeply moving. I have also been deeply moved and helped when people have prayed with me and for me.

And Paul prays that their love would grow more and more in knowledge and depth of insight.

Paul is so passionate about this church that it would be shaped by love and knowledge – by truth and compassion.

What a powerful combination that is.

Paul is praying that this church would not stand still – with Paul it's always more and more.

More and more love. More and more knowledge and understanding.

Paul's prayer for the church is that they don't stop or stand still or settle for what they've got. Paul would say be more radical in your love and go deeper in the Scriptures.

Do you remember from last week we said that the word 'rejoice' occurs 9 times and the word 'joy' is used 5 times, but Paul refers to Jesus some 40 times.

In other words, Paul is always steering the conversation towards Jesus – and that's what he does in his prayer. He is praying that they will live their lives in such a way that they will be ready to meet Jesus when he comes again.

**Song** Brother, sister, let me serve you

### **Benediction**

May the love of the Father,  
The tenderness of the Son,  
And the presence of the Spirit,  
Bring joy to your heart and peace to your soul,  
This day and all days, Amen.