

22nd Sunday after Trinity/Anniversary Sunday
St. John the Baptist Anglican Church, North Sydney

17 November 2019, 8:00 AM

Book of Common Prayer (Canada) pp 254-255

In the name of God: +Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Collect Prayer for today, this 22nd Sunday after Trinity (and also our Anniversary Sunday, St. John's celebrates 142)...couldn't be more fitting for St. John's.

Lord, we beseech thee to keep thy household the Church in continual godliness; that through thy protection it may be free from all adversities, and devoutly given to serve thee in good works, to the glory of thy Name.

This prayer appropriately reminds us that God's household the Church is in God's hands and that it is best for us to leave it there. We pray this on our Anniversary, a time to pause and to remember.

It's as Paul writes in his Letter to the Philippians: "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you." He trusts that all is being held by God.

We get no sense of Paul's apprehension in the face of the possibility of his execution in Rome. He wrote these words as a prisoner. This letter is addressed to the Church that Paul established in Macedonia around the year 62. Scholars estimate that Jesus died somewhere between the years 30 and 36. So, these words from Paul were written only about 30 years after the death of Jesus. What we get here is a sense of Paul's deep love for faith in God through Jesus Christ. And, we get a sense of Paul's deep love for the people.

Paul continues..."always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy." Paul's love propels him to pray for others. He says that he finds it a joy, a privilege, to carry his regard for the church to God in prayer. Here it sounds a lot like what we talk about at Soup and Soul on Thursdays...about how prayer is as accessible as taking time to talk, to listen and to be still with God as part of our daily lives. Paul gives us this same sense that he, too, does this, spending time with God as he would do with a friend.

And here is Paul's total trust in God coming through once more – "[I make my request with joy] for your fellowship in the Gospel from the first day until now; being confident of this very good thing, that he who hath begun a very good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ; even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defense and confirmation of the Gospel."

Paul's Letter is good instruction for the Church today. It's just four chapters long. I invite you to spend some time with it at home this coming week as St. John's embarks on its 143rd year.

And, here's why.

There's a lot of anxiety in the Church these days. The Church is good at remembering its past. But, sometimes I wonder if that gets in our way. So and so used to do this but they can't anymore. We don't have [fill-in the blank] anymore. No one goes to church anymore. That's one of my favourite ones because it's not hard to address. If you find yourself saying something like this to me, "No one goes to church anymore." You might hear me say, "Well, I think you're somebody and you're here."

Here's the truth about St. John's. St. John's is still alive and will continue to be because we are people that live Paul's faith. Our faith does not exist because of what happened in 1877, the founding of this Church. It began much earlier, somewhere in the year 3 or 4 with the birth of Jesus Christ. Again – have a look at Philippians, it's a short book.

Ask yourself as you read and pray: Where am I in this, where are we as a church like what you will read about this week? Where could we do a better job as we embark on this next year in our history? Ask yourself, What am I willing to personally do so that this may happen.

I hope that you will take me up on my invitation to read Philippians this week.

It could be that as you read and reflect, as you pray...you may see as Paul did. He could have wrung his hands thinking the end is near, the church is dying...it has no future. He knew he was going to be executed, after all. And, he was beheaded within the year or two following the writing of this letter.

But, Paul knew that the anxieties of the world have no place in the church of Christ. This truth is no less real to us as member of Christ's Body today, then it was for Paul and the Church in Macedonia.

This is my invitation to you on this anniversary Sunday as your interim incumbent. I ask that you enter more fully into a time of discernment for God's call in your personal life and for the life of this congregation remembering that it all started centuries before, when God's sent his Son into the world.

In the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.