

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: In the LORD

Lesson: Philippians 4:1-9

4 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends! ² I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³ Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. ⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

I read a story recently, and it's about used cars, which is something I talked about last week too.

One day, a father said to his son: “You graduated with honors, here is a car that I acquired many years ago... It is more than 50 years old. Before I give it to you, take it to the downtown used car lot and tell them I want to sell it and see how much they offer you.” The son went to the used car lot, returned to his father, and said: “They offered me \$1,000 because it looks very worn out.” Then, the father said, “Take it to the pawnshop.”

The son went to the pawnshop, returned to his father and said, “The pawnshop offered \$100 because it was a very old car.” The father next asked his son to take the car to a car club and show them the car. The son took the car to the car club, returned and said to his father: “Dad! Some people in the club offered \$ 100,000 for it since it is a Classic Mustang and highly sought after among the members of the club” The father said to his son, “I wanted you to know that the right place values you the right way!” If you are not valued, do not be angry, it means that you are in the wrong place. Those who know your value are those who appreciate you, and never stay in a place where no one sees your value!!”

Friends, who is the One who knows everything about us? Who knows our true value? It's Jesus Christ. When we walk our life journey with Him, we find real joy

and our lives become full of happiness. The peace, joy, and happiness we experience while abiding in Jesus Christ cannot be compared, either in quality or quantity, to the temporary pleasures that the world offers. When we dwell in Jesus Christ, our lives are filled with joy and happiness, free from worries and anxieties.

Friends, can we promise together to find happiness in Jesus Christ, look for joy, and remain strong in the Lord throughout our lives? The Lord will remember and bless you.

In today's scripture lesson, the Apostle Paul talks about his strong connection with Jesus Christ. He often stresses the expression "in the Lord" when he speaks or advises others. For Paul, believing in Jesus means abiding "in the Lord."

In verse 1, Paul says, "...You should stand firm in the Lord." In verse 2, he states, "...agree with each other in the Lord." In verse 4, he says, "Rejoice in the Lord always..." In verse 7, he says, "The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

As we read the letters written by the Apostle Paul, including those in Philippians, we notice that he frequently uses phrases like "In the Lord" or "In Christ Jesus." This is because "In the Lord" is at the core of his faith.

The Apostle Paul did not believe in Jesus Christ as a historical figure.

There are many famous historical figures. When I recently visited Washington D.C. with my parents, we first went to the Lincoln Memorial. It was amazing to see the Abraham Lincoln statue up close, as I'd only seen it in movies. People admire many historical figures like George Washington, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Edison, and Martin Luther King Jr. The significant difference between these historical figures and Jesus Christ is that Jesus Christ is still alive. Unfortunately, some people think of Jesus Christ as just a historical figure.

The Jesus that the Apostle Paul met was the risen Jesus. Before his conversion, the Apostle Paul's name was Saul. He was a Jew and a Pharisee. Today, we often have a negative perception of the word "Pharisee," but at the time, Pharisees were considered elites, financially prosperous, and held a respected social status. When he was known as Saul, he thought of Jesus as a kind of heretic. So, after Jesus' death, he persecuted those who followed Jesus. One day, while Saul was on his way to Damascus to arrest Christians, he suddenly saw a very powerful light from heaven, became temporarily blinded, and heard the voice of the Lord: "Saul, Saul,

why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 9:4). Saul realized this was God's voice, repented, and came to believe in the risen Jesus Christ.

In this way, the Jesus the Apostle Paul encountered was the living Jesus. That's why he uses the expression "In the Lord" repeatedly. Jesus is still alive. Saying "In the Lord" means being in one body with the Lord. Believing in Jesus Christ like Paul is true faith.

The Jesus that Apostle Paul met was alive, risen from the dead. Before he changed his ways, Paul was called Saul, and he was a Jewish Pharisee. In those days, Pharisees were highly regarded, well-off, and held a respected position in society. Back then, Saul considered Jesus a heretic, and after Jesus' death, he even persecuted Jesus' followers. One day, while Saul was traveling to Damascus to arrest Christians, he suddenly saw a very bright light from heaven, went temporarily blind, and heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 9:4). Saul recognized it as God's voice, repented, and started believing in the risen Jesus Christ.

This shows that the Jesus Apostle Paul encountered was very much alive. That's why he repeatedly uses the expression "In the Lord." Jesus is still alive. Saying "In the Lord" means being closely connected with Jesus. Believing in Jesus Christ, just as Paul did, is true faith.

As this year comes to an end, I hope that starting today, you'll be strong in the Lord. Believing in Jesus, like the Apostle Paul did, can bring a real transformation to our lives. True belief changes us, making us love one another and become one. We'll find joy, have no worries, and always be thankful when we remain in Jesus. In Jesus, we experience God's overflowing peace in our hearts.

In verse 2, the Apostle Paul is talking to Euodia and Syntyche. They were important leaders in the Philippian church and good examples for the congregation. They had key positions in the church. But, they had a problem - they were in a serious conflict. Even though they were people of great character whose names were in the book of life, they couldn't agree with each other and often argued. This conflict was significant enough to be recorded in the Bible.

The story of Euodia and Syntyche shows that, like pastors, lay leaders, and everyone else, we can have conflicts and disagreements even though we believe in Jesus because we're all human. When various personalities come together in a community, it's natural for conflicts to happen. But we shouldn't think it's okay to

accept or ignore these conflicts just because they're common. This isn't just my opinion; it's what the Apostle Paul believed. If Paul thought that church disputes and conflicts were normal and decided to overlook them, he wouldn't have written in verse 2 to "agree with each other in the Lord."

Sometimes, we might judge, blame, or gossip about others because of our human weaknesses. But at the same time, we should remember that we are people who belong to the Lord.

It can be tough to agree with each other based solely on our efforts and abilities, and it might even seem impossible at times. Some people may confidently claim that human capabilities can achieve anything, but at the same time, we often tend to reject or judge those who are even slightly different from us. Nevertheless, the Lord encourages us to love one another and to stand united.

Without God, our abilities are insufficient. Thinking we can achieve everything with our own strength is a mistake. Loving others, forgiving, or agreeing with each other solely through our capabilities is beyond our limits, and it reveals our weaknesses.

Peter, when he tried to walk on the water like Jesus, became fearful when he felt the cold water, saw the strong wind and waves, and started sinking. But when he called out to Jesus for help and reached out to Him, Jesus saved him. With Jesus, Peter could walk on the water and return to the boat.

Friends, we should remain in the Lord. What we should pray for during this time is that we can continue dwelling in the Lord because all the joys and happiness in life, gratitude, harmony, reconciliation, unity, and holiness are found in the Lord.

I pray that you'll abide in the Lord daily and stand firm in Him. I'll conclude today's message with a reading from John 15:4-8.

⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. Amen.