

“Co-Union”
Philippians 3:4b-14

Although I do not think of myself as a “fan of the screen”, in other words, I don’t watch a lot of tv, there is a program on Sunday night that I often watch. It is called “The Amazing Race”. Have any of you watched it? What I find fascinating about the program is that there are couples sent on a race all over the world. They are given directions for the race with clues which take them to countries all over the globe. The couples are all different, some are husband and wife, some friends, a parent and child or 2 siblings. Regardless of who they are, they all run the same race. Now this isn’t just a foot race. Although this race IS comprised of speed, it is about how these couples work together in various tasks or challenges they are given throughout their journey. It appears that the couples that win the race or finish on top may look totally different on the outside, yet they have certain qualities or characteristics that enable them to work together or support each other.

It is much like today’s reading wherein the Philippian congregation becomes a source of ongoing support for Paul’s ministry. Paul’s letter to the church at Philippi is really a thank-you note in return for the loving generosity of the congregation, who sent a “care package” to Paul while he was imprisoned.

Throughout this love letter, Paul continues to point his disciples back to the true source of all that they have received, the one who sustains him in good and difficult days. Paul uses powerful language in his opening lines,

“living is Christ and dying is gain” (1:21), and again in his closing comments, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me (4:13).

Well, this all sounds great, but where do we find our clues for this race or journey? Where do we get support? Like Paul, we need to look to scripture’s testimonies of people of faith as they came to know and walk with Jesus. Look to Christian history’s stories of stalwart, adventurous Christians throughout the world. Look to your own acquaintances with such people of faith today. All of these sources can verify or support that life in Christ is what gives us strength to press on or continue the race.

Paul wants to encourage or support the congregation at Philippi with faith and optimism. He looks without fear at their course and the obstacles or adversaries they all face now and will face in the future. Paul knows he has already won, and he encourages the church to celebrate their victory as well. To live is to serve the ones he loves, continue preaching the gospel, and follow Christ. To die is to realize the fulfillment of the resurrection promise.

Like the couples in the Amazing Race, in order to finish they “walk the walk” or “walk the talk”. Years ago, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes helped to bring that phrase into common use among high school and college athletes. In their huddles, the meaning was clear: “Practice what you preach,” or more important, “Practice what you believe.”

Paul reminds the church at Philippi and us to do more than merely declare allegiance to Christ; we are called live our faith ... press on toward

the goal. As Saint Francis of Assisi is reported to have said, “Preach the gospel at all times and when necessary use words.”

A young officer being considered for promotion stopped to purchase a newspaper. A passerby dropped some coins in the machine, took out a paper, and held the door open for the officer. “Go ahead and take one; no one will know,” he offered. For a moment the officer held the door as the purchaser went his way. Finally, he closed the door, inserted his own coins, and took his paper. Later that morning, in the interview supporting his promotion, the attending general retold the newspaper story. “I watched to see what you would do. Had you taken the paper without paying, I was determined to pass you over for the promotion. You see, I am looking for men of character who live their principles even when no one is around.”

The very future of the gospel is in our hands, and we never know who may be watching. We need to talk the talk and walk the walk. We can start right now, this very moment ... we don't have to wait!

First we need to forget about all our yesterdays. I want everyone to join me in clenching our fists which represent all we are holding onto. Now I want you to open your fist stretching your fingers as we let go of whatever holds us back. Let's do it again. Clench those fists tight and now release and let go.

Now we are ready to experience this table, the Lord's table. When we serve communion, watch as everyone comes forward. You'll see people of every shape, size and personality imaginable. You'll see the young and

the old, the brilliant and those who struggle, every background, every life situation, every problem and all challenges. Each has been invited or coupled with Jesus Christ, and you'll see them all together, coming to Him.

This is the race we run ... what a stunning picture of redemption! On this world communion Sunday, can there be any doubt that He loves us, that His arms reach out and take us all in? Thanks be to God! Amen.