

“Under Construction”

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Philippians 1:1-11

Acts 16:6-15

One day Billy and Ruth Graham were driving through a long stretch of road construction...you've been there done that.....the slowdowns, stops, detours, and pot holes along the way. Finally they reached the end of the construction with smooth pavement stretched out before them. At that point a sign caught Ruth's attention and she told Billy, *“that's what I would like on my tombstone.”* The sign read, *“End of Construction. Thanks for Your Patience.”*

I like that! *“End of Construction. Thanks for your Patience.”* The best is yet to come.....the construction project is complete....thanks for your help along the way. I like that! *“End of Construction. Thanks for your Patience!”* The truth is that all of us are a work in progress....as long as we breathe we will be under construction. And for some of us, mawah, a lot of patience is needed from others throughout our lifelong construction process! While I have breath let me say to you, “Thanks for your patience!”

If anyone understood that we humans are perpetually under construction it was the apostle Paul who once said of himself, *“I am the foremost of sinners.”* (I Timothy 1:15) On another occasion he said, *“I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.”* (Romans 7:15) Paul recognized that we humans are a work in progress. However, he was also wildly optimistic about our future. One of Paul's clearest statements of optimism is found in the first chapter of his letter to the church at Philippi.

Philippians 1:1-11

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: ²Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³I thank my God every time I remember you, ⁴constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, ⁵because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

⁷It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

⁸For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus.

⁹And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight ¹⁰to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless,

¹¹having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

Of all the churches Paul established, the church at Philippi was the one he shared the greatest affection toward. Paul wrote this letter from prison in Rome and in his letter he wrote, ***"I thank my God every time I remember you, ⁴constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, ⁵because of your sharing (koinonia) in the gospel from the first day until now."*** Think of those friends or family members you haven't seen for a long time and when you finally get together it's like no time has lapsed.

You pick up right where you left off. That's the kind of relationship Paul had with the church in Philippi.

Who were these people? It was quite a diverse group! We know there was a wealthy business woman by the name of **Lydia** who had come to Philippi from Thyatira. She was in the business of selling purple cloth and anyone who dealt with purple had to have a lot of financial backing. Paul met Lydia at a place of prayer by a river outside the city. ***"The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul."*** She committed her life to Jesus Christ and was baptized in the river along with her household. She is considered the first European convert to Christianity. She was so thankful to Paul and his traveling companions that she invited them to stay at her home. That's why I have titled the Bible Study on Philippians ***"The Church that Met at Lydia's Home."*** By the way, you are invited to come next Sunday at 9:30 in the Chapel to learn more about this letter Paul sent from a Roman prison.

Paul was also writing to a *slave girl* that, at one time, had been abused and misused. The girl had the ability to tell fortunes and a group of men got rich by selling her fortune-telling services. This slave girl, who had a special view into the spirit world, would follow Paul and his friends crying out, ***“These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.”*** To be quite honest, her persistent cries annoyed Paul and interfered with his ministry, so he cast out the evil spirit. Paul’s actions gave the girl the wonderful gift of sanity but her owners were furious at Paul for ruining their chance to make money from the slave girl.

These men raised a ruckus with the officials who had Paul and Silas flogged and thrown in jail. That night an earthquake hit the town and the doors of the jail came off. The *jailer* thought his prisoners had escaped. Just as he was about to take his own life, Paul stopped him. The jailer, who had heard Paul and Silas singing songs of praise during the night, saw the hand of God in the whole experience and said, ***“What must I do to be saved?”*** Paul told him to, ***“Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.”*** The jailer and his household were then baptized.

That’s the nucleus of the church that met in Lydia’s home. *What do they have in common?* Not much! *Lydia* the businesswoman who was used to hob knobbing with the rich and famous brought a worldly sophistication to the table. The *slave girl* who had been abused and used for the purpose of making men rich, most likely, brought serious trust issues to the table. The *jailer* who was, very possibly, a retired Roman veteran of foreign wars brought a no-nonsense toughness to the table. No they didn’t have much in common, yet they were the joy of Paul’s life and the core of the Philippian church. *What held them together?*

Paul was a realist and he knew a fellowship as diverse as the church that met in Lydia’s home could easily become polarized or drift apart if they relied on personality, persuasion, programs or parties. *What could have united Lydia, the slave girl and the Roman jailer?*

“I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.”

Paul was confident and I believe Lydia, the slave girl and the jailer were confident that God was not finished with them yet. That God was doing a good work in them. They knew their calling was to bring to the table their under construction lives and to offer themselves in faith, hope and love to the One who could be trusted to complete the good work in God's good timing.

Yes, Paul was a realist and he knew that human effort would not keep the *koinonia fellowship* at Philippi united. Paul knew that we humans can easily thwart God's construction project. In order to move forward with their construction he knew that his Philippian friends needed to be of one mind. But to have the same mind does *not* mean they would think the same or hold the same opinions. To be of one mind is to have the mind of Christ. In the second chapter of his letter to the Philippians, Paul writes, "***Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus....***" Then he sets forth one of the most beautiful descriptions of Christ's mind. Christ's mind led him to humble himself, take the form of a human being and give himself in service to others, even to the point of dying for others. That's the mind of Christ!

We at Fairmont are a diverse group of people, not unlike the fellowship at Philippi. We also need the mind of Christ to stay connected. This past Thursday evening I saw God's good work in two of our members who have totally opposite views on the ordination issue facing our denomination. At our meeting on Amendment 10A which, by the way, was affirmed at yesterday's Presbytery meeting, I saw God at work through the respectful, non-judgmental and humble way in which these two members expressed their polar opposite views on this hot button issue. When we have opposite points of view we are prone to either fight with those holding the other view or flee into a camp of same thinking people. I left that meeting thanking God for the good work God is doing in Fairmont's *koinonia fellowship*.

None of us have reached the *end of construction*. God still has construction projects to complete within us....individually and as Fairmont Presbyterian Church. *So what do we bring to the table....the communion table, the board room table, the fellowship table, the coffee table and all tables of our lives?* We bring the faith, hope and love in Jesus Christ which is eloquently expressed, "***I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.***"

