Pastor Barry South, CP First Presbyterian Church Grand Bay October 11, 2026

Sermon: "Of the Same Mind"
Scripture: Philippians 4:1-9
Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved. I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the Gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.
THIS IS THE WORD OF THE LORD.

There is no joy in the world like bringing another soul to Jesus Christ. Three times in the first four verses of this fourth chapter, the words "In the Lord" occur. There are three great commandments which Paul gives in the Lord. The Philippians are to stand fast in the Lord. Only with Jesus Christ can we resist the seductions of temptation and the weakness of cowardness. We know very well that there are some people in whose company it is easy to do the wrong thing, and there are some in whose company it is easy to resist the wrong thing. Sometimes, when we look back and remember an occasion when we took the wrong turning or fell to temptation or shamed ourselves, we say timidly, thinking of someone whom we love: "If only he, if only she had been there, it would never have happened." Our only safety against temptation is to be "In the Lord", always feeling his presence around us and about us.

Paul tells of Euodia and Syntyche to agree in the Lord. There can be no unity unless it is in Christ. In ordinary human affairs, it repeatedly happens that the most diverse people are held together because they all give allegiance to a great leader. Their loyalty to each other depends entirely on their loyalty to that person. Take the leader away, and the whole group would disintegrate into isolated and often warring units. People can never really love each other until they love Christ. Human fellowship is impossible without the lordship of Christ.
Paul tells the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord. The one thing everyone needs to learn about Joy is that it has nothing to do with material things or with our outward circumstances. It is the simple fact of human experience that someone living in the lap of luxury can be wretched and someone else who is in the depths of poverty can overflow with joy. One person upon whom life has apparently inflicted no blows at all can be gloomily or fretfully discontented, and another upon whom life has inflicted every possible blow can be serenely joyful.

In the immortal letter which Captain Robert Scott of the Antarctic wrote, when the chill breath of death was already on his expedition: "We are pegging out in a very comfortable spot … We are in a desperate state – feet frozen, etc. … no fuel, and a long way from food, but it would do your heart good to be in our tent, to hear the songs and the cheery conversation." The secret is this – that happiness depends not on things or on places, but always on persons. If we are with the right person, nothing else matters; and if we are not with the right person, nothing can make up for that absence. In the presence of Jesus Christ, in the Lord, the greatest of all friends is with us; nothing can separate us from that presence, and so nothing can take away our joy.

This is the passage about which we would very much like to know more. There is obvious drama, heartbreak and great deeds behind it. It may well have been that they were women in whose homes two of the house congregations of Philippi met.

It is very interesting to see women playing such a leading part in the affairs of one of the early congregations, for in Greece women remained very much in the background. It was the aim of the Greeks that a respectable woman should "See as little, hear as little and ask as little as possible". A respectable woman never appeared on the street alone; she had her own apartments in the house and never joined the male members of the family, even for meals. Least of all did she play any part in public life. But Philippi was in Macedonia, and in Macedonia things were vert different. There, women had a freedom and a place which was unheard of in the rest of Greece.

It is significant that, when there was a quarrel at Philippi, Paul mobilized the whole resources of the church to mend it. He thought there was no effort too great to maintain the peace of the church. A quarrelling church is no church at all, for it is one from which Christ has been shut out. No one can be at peace with God and at variance with others.

Paul sets before the Philippians two great qualities of the Christian life. The first is the quality of joy. "Rejoice … I will say it again – rejoice!" It is as if, having said "Rejoice!", a picture of all that was to come flashed into his mind. He himself was lying in prison with almost certain death awaiting him; the Philippians were setting out on the Christian way, and dark days, dangers and persecutions inevitably lay ahead. So, Paul says: "I know what I'm saying. I've thought of everything that could possibly happen. And still, I say it – Rejoice!" Christian joy is independent of all things on earth because it has its source in the continual presence of Christ. Two people who love each other are always happy when they are together, no matter where they are. Christians can never lose their joy because they can never lose Christ.
Paul goes on, "Let your moderation be known to all men." "Let all the world know that you will meet a man half-way." There may be individual instances where a perfectly just law becomes unjust or where justice is not the same as fairness.

People have the quality of moderation if they know when not to apply the strict letter of the law, when to relax justice and introduce mercy. Let us take a simple example every teacher encounters almost every day. Here are two students. We correct their examination papers. We apply justice and find that one has 80 percent and the other 50 percent. But we go a little further and find that the one that got 80 percent has been able to work in ideal conditions with books, leisure and peace to study, while the one who got 50 percent struggles to cope financially and has inadequate equipment, or has been ill, or has recently come through some time of sorrow or strain. In justice, this student deserves 50 percent and no more; but moderation will value the examination paper far higher than that.

Christians, as Paul sees it, are men and women who know that there is something beyond justice. When the woman taken in adultery was brought before him, Jesus could have applied the letter of the law, according to which she should have been stoned to death; but he went beyond justice.

As far as justice goes, there is not one of us that deserves anything other than the condemnation of God; but God goes far beyond justice. Paul lays it down that the mark of Christians in their personal relationships with others must be that they know when to insist on justice and when to remember that there is something beyond justice.

Why should we be like this? Why should we have this joy and gracious gentleness in our lives? Because, says Paul, the Lord is at hand. If we remember the coming triumph of Christ, we can never lose our hope and our joy. If we remember that life is short, we will not want to enforce the stern justice which so often divides people but will want to deal with others in love, as hope that God will deal with us. Justice is human, but moderation is divine.

For the Philippians, life was bound to be a source of worry. Even to be a human being and so to be vulnerable to all the chances and the changes of this mortal life is in itself a cause for worry; and in the

early Church, to the normal worry of the human situation there was added the worry of being a Christian, which meant taking one's life in one's hands.

Paul's solution is prayer. Paul stresses that we can take everything to God in prayer. "There is nothing too great for God's power; and nothing too small for his fatherly care". We can bring our prayers, our petitions and our requests to God; we can pray for ourselves. We can pray for forgiveness for the past. For things we need in the present, and for help and guidance for the future. Every prayer must surely include thanks for the privilege of prayer itself. We must give thanks in everything, in laughter and in tears, in sorrow and in joy alike. We must remember the love of God, which only desires what is best for us. Remember the wisdom of God, which alone knows what is best for us. And the power of God, which alone can bring about that which is best for us.

The human mind will always set itself on something, and Paul wanted to be quite sure that the Philippians would set their minds on the right things. This is something of great importance, because it is the law of life that, if we think of something often enough, we will come to the stage when we cannot stop thinking about it. Our thoughts will be quite literally in a groove out of which we cannot jolt them.

It is, therefore, of the first importance that we should set our thoughts upon the fine things. Such as, there are things which are true. Many things in this world are deceptive, promising what they can never perform, offering false peace and happiness which they can never supply. We should always set our thoughts on the things which will not let us down. There are things that are honest, honorable, and worthy. When used to describe an individual, it describes a person who moves through life as if the whole world were the temple of God.

There are things in this world which are flippant and cheap and attractive to those who never take life seriously; but it is on the things which are serious and dignified that Christians will set their minds. There are things which are just. As the one who gives to God and to other people what is their due. In other words, just is the word of duty faced and duty done. There are those who set their minds on pleasure, comfort, and easy ways. The Christians thoughts are on duty to other people and duty to God. There are things which are pure. The word describes what is morally uncontaminated.

It describes that which has been so cleansed that it is fit to be brought into the presence of God and used in his service. This world is full of things which are sordid and shabby and soiled and smutty. Many people develop a way of thinking that soils everything. The Christians mind is set on things that are pure; the Christians thoughts are so clean that they can stand even the scrutiny of God. There are things that are lovely. There are those whose minds are so set on vengeance and punishment that they cause bitterness and fear in others. There are those whose minds are so set on criticism and rebuke that they bring out resentment in others. Christians set their minds on the lovely things – kindness, sympathy, patience – so they are lovely people, whose presence inspires feelings of love. There are things of good report, gracious, fair speaking. It might not be going too far as to say that it describes the things which are fit for God to hear. There are too many ugly words and false words and impure words in this world. On the lips and in the minds of Christians, there should be only words which are fit for God to hear. If there be any virtue, excellence.

In classical thought, it describes every kind of excellence. It could describe the excellence of the ground in a field, the excellence of a tool for its purpose, the physical excellence of an animal, the excellence of the courage of a soldier or an individual. Think of your past life at its highest, to spur you on to new heights of the Christian way. The world has its impurities and its degradations, but it also has its fine qualities and its brave actions, and it is of the highest things that Christians must think. If there be any praise. In one sense, it is true that Christians never think of the praise of others, but in another sense, it is true that every good individual is uplifted by the praise of good men and women. Christians will live in such a way that they will neither conceitedly desire nor foolishly despise the praise of others.

In this passage, Paul lays down the way of true teaching. He speaks of the things which the Philippians have learned. These are the things in which he personally instructed them. This stands for the personal interpretation of the Gospel, which Paul brought to them. This, then, stands for the accepted teachings of the Church, which Paul had handed on to them.

Closing Prayer:
Holy God, by the grace of your Spirit, may these prayers be more than words. Teach us to pray without ceasing that your will may be done in our lives, to the glory of Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

Benediction:
The peace of God, passes all understanding. That does not mean that the peace of God is such a mystery that the human mind cannot understand it. It means that the peace of God is so precious that the human mind, with all its skill and all its knowledge, can never produce it. It can never be of our contriving; it is only of God's giving. The way to peace is in prayer to entrust ourselves and all whom we hold dear to the loving hands of God. NOW GO IN PEACE!