

18<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity – 11<sup>th</sup> October 2020  
Philippians 4v1-9

**4 weeks ago**, our lectionary readings touched (in Matthew 18) on protocols for when relationships sour, go belly-up amongst people of faith. Today's reading from Philippians 4 includes what could be deemed a case-study.

To be fair ... compared to Christians in Corinth or the region of Galatia those at Philippi were stars, jewels in Paul's crown in terms of how they lived as those representing Jesus. Even so Paul allows **no complacency**. What may have begun as not much more than a spat, rather than for example a major division over doctrine, had caught Paul's attention; presumably the time lag between Paul hearing of it and him writing this letter had not solved the matter. He wanted it resolved, the restoration of harmony and fellowship was clearly taking precedence over his need to repeat (for our benefit) the detail of their conflict.

Some of you may have noticed some people wearing a bracelet or the like with the letters **WWJD** clearly visible. They stand for "*What would Jesus do?*"; and could be a shorthand summary of much of Paul's teaching on how we are to function as followers of Jesus. In Philippians chapter 2 his premise for much of the epistle is that when we become God's people through faith in Jesus, we re-invested with the capacity to think and live like Jesus. Something we are encouraged to cultivate (see Philippians 2v1-13).

What Paul says about addressing this particular personal conflict is:

- a) **Brushing things under the carpet is not the answer** ... it may be very CofE in times past but is very NOT the church of Jesus Christ. Paul has no qualms about mentioning in writing what he saw as a stain on the life and standing of the local church; so that the boil could be lanced.
- b) **Pursuing reconciliation is us wanting to stay in a good place with the Lord himself**. Paul confronts this matter on the basis of how he describes us at the end of chapter 3 – as heaven's citizens, waiting for the second coming of Jesus; so, in 4v1 we stand firm in our relationship with the Lord.

That shapes our approach to the earthly issues; and, because our identity as Christians is as those who been reconciled to God, this provokes our involvement with the ministry of reconciling broken

relationships around us (see 2 Corinthians 5v18-20). Freely we have received so freely we give.

- c) **Working for restoration when relationships break down is a shared responsibility** – in v3 he alludes to an unnamed individual functioning as a mediator; even so, whilst mediation may be a gift some have (and many breathe a sigh of relief they don't!), it is part of a public and circular letter - all are caught by the injunction.

There is a lot more in this short passage not directly related to the falling out of Euodia and Syntyche. But it all fits and flows together. For example:

- V4-6: We CAN rejoice in the Lord, quash lurking anxiety, be abundant in our praying when we are immovable from that place of lively contact with the Lord. In John 4v34 Jesus shows us how he did life (and sometimes made strange choices in the eyes of others): *“My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.”* **Jesus saw no reason, irrespective of pressures or uncertainties we face, to lose connectivity.** Rather it was that connectivity with the Father feeding his worldview and every-day choices.
- V8-9: Because we live in a world desperately trying to distract us it is by disciplining what we allow in our thinking we remain focussed and purposeful. **Being a Christian is not just a part of who we are.** What we do, who we build community with, how we approach work or conduct business or what we do with leisure and family is how and where we work out our faith. And,
- Peace gets mentioned twice, in v7 and v9. Peace is more than the absence of conflict; peace is a mark of God's presence with us, because he is the God of peace (Hebrews 13v20). As we foster a culture and exercise a reconciling influence ... as we activate our relationship with God moment by moment ... as we rein in how we think so that what is good and wholesome settles, becomes part of the “real me” we stumble across more than we expect – **we find ourselves bumping into the very nature of God himself, or to be more precise ... He puts himself in our way so that can't avoid his contact and** experience the impact in how we feel.

How does that work? In part it is a mystery but (in theological jargon) it is a function of what the Holy Spirit does in us and around us as we allow him (Holy Spirit) to facilitate the indwelling of the Trinity with us (John 14v23).