

## Lenten Devotional February 16, 2024

### Scripture

#### Philippians 4:1-9

*1 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.*

*2 I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 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.*

*4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. 5 Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. 6 Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

*8 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. 9 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.*

### Devotion

#### The Rev. Robin Sharp '18

Normally, I would not consider myself a vocal feminist. It isn't that I don't believe in gender equality, because I do. Perhaps I am not a vocal feminist, because I consider gender equality to be broader than between males and females. I am, however, intrigued by the Apostle Paul's reference to the women, Euodia and Syntyche. In a culture where men are considered "superior," he is asking this young church—"his loyal companion"—to help these women reach an understanding. Paul values these two individuals as being as important to the growing Church as the men who have also engaged in the same work of the gospel. And yes, he is doing so because their disagreement is bitter enough to harm this community. It is not the topic of the disagreement that is disconcerting; the crisis Paul addresses is where genuine peace is lacking Christ cannot be present.

Doesn't this underline the importance of women in this Philippian church? Paul did not cast aside their quarrel as immaterial because they were women and therefore little or no harm could come from it. He saw it on the same plane as the frictions found in the Book of Acts: circumcised or not, kosher diet or not, and adherence to Temple Rule and customs or not. These were subjects of disagreement that could have shattered the fragile young church because Christ could not exist within that friction.

Paul has long been considered to treat women in the church as subservient. I admit to leaning this way. His encounter with Lydia, the merchant of purple dye (Acts 16:13-15), as well as today's passage, tells the world otherwise. Today, I see Paul tell us the love of Jesus breaks barriers and works towards trust and forgiveness. Isn't that the message of the cross?

## **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, we continue to learn and grow through your grace and your love. Please help us to remove the roots of dissension from our souls bringing peace into your kingdom. Amen.