

Standing Firm, Side-by-Side

Michael J. Nielsen / General

Philippians / Encouragement; Faith; Life; Death; Gospel / Philippians 1:12–14; Philippians 1:19–30

Confirmation Sunday

- › Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Paul's letter to the church in Philippi is a letter of friendship. Paul's letter to the church in Philippi is a letter of joy! A letter of joy even when the author sits in prison. It's not just that, but as Paul sits in prison, he continues to share the gospel and encourage the people of Philippi. There is a lot of room for encouragement, even in the most harmonious of congregations. Today is a day a day of encouragement for not just you Summer and Brady but for all of you. It's a day to encourage you to live your life worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Confirmation Day is finally here, delayed four months. It's a great day in the life of a congregation. It's a great day for two of our young people. Faith is something we should all celebrate. Now this doesn't mean that this is the last time we see them here. This is not graduation. It pains me to have to say that every confirmation day. This is different and in some ways I am glad that Confirmation has found its way to the September calendar and away from graduation season. Today we can focus on the text.

St. Paul gives his report of his time in prison. He's in chains, he is separated from them. Yet, even while in chains for the sake of the Gospel, the Philippian congregation sends him a gift, so he responds with a letter of thanks, and update on his condition, and some encouragement. Actually a lot of encouragement!

And his encouragement comes in the form of Jesus! Jesus who Paul was living for and who he would die for! Here's Paul's encouragement both for you as

confirmands and for all of you sitting in the pews today or watching at home or listening over the telephone:

English Standard Version Chapter 1

27 Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,

Whether you are confessing for the first time with Paul, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain,” or if this is the 80th time you’ve relived your confirmation promises this verse is for you! St. Paul has the strong desire to come back and see his friends in Philippi. Whether he is able to or not, he doesn’t know yet, but what he does is encourage them, to encourage them **to live** for Christ. He encourages to do that so that whether he comes to them or not he hears that are **standing firm** in one spirit **side by side** for the faith of the gospel.

Paul is encouraging them no matter what happens to him to conduct their lives worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The root verb for what read as “Let your manner of life be worthy...” is actually “exercise citizenship.” These Philippian people, many of them were proud Roman army veterans. They were proud of their Roman citizenship.

Paul encourages them to live as citizens in the Kingdom of God. And they do this by standing firm in one spirit and side-by-side for the faith of the gospel. That’s my encouragement to you today. As those loved by God, who have been called according to his purpose, stand firm in one spirit and striving side by side for the faith of gospel even in danger, even in the face of things that cause you to be afraid.

Summer, Brady, parents, grandparents, family and friends, members of Salem Lutheran Church, we are living in anxious times. There are opponents to the Christian church. They are seeking to destroy it. Persecution is here and is happening in our country. It happens subtly. The devil has sneaky tactics to get at the church and the individual Christian.

I can tell you it happens. It happens at school when you are ridiculed for standing up for what’s right. You are ridiculed when someone sees you in prayer. Perhaps it even happens in class when you challenge a teacher on a topic such as

evolution. If that hasn't happened to you and you are in school, it will. Persecution of Christians is happening. You very well might suffer for your faith and when you do, know that you are engaged in the same conflict that St. Paul and the Philippian Christians were. There is nothing new under the sun.

It's hard to be a Christian now and navigate life alone. Here's my encouragement to you Summer and Brady and to the rest of you sitting here today, watching online or listening over the phone...stand firm in one spirit with your brothers and sisters in Christ. Strive side by side for the faith of the gospel. Don't neglect the hearing of the Word.

Did you know that it only takes two or three times Sundays of not coming to church in a row to get into the habit of not coming? There have been good things that have happened in the church due to the Covid-19 Pandemic: many churches are seeing more people here the Gospel because of the virtual services. The Church has now embraced the internet more so, just as it has done the radio and TV. This is good. Churches have come together to provide physical help such as food in many areas across the globe.

There have been some fears of not being in the building. This is when it becomes a habit of not going to church. Churches in certain parts of the country have been open for months. We've been back together in person for 3 months now - what a blessing. But many have embraced staying away...not because of their concern for the virus, but because it's comfortable to not have this on their weekly to do list. Maybe they watch it online, maybe not. It's become a convenient excuse to not come to the Lord's House.

It's not just a virus that does this. It's also sports, laziness, apathy, and all the other excuses one can come up with for not coming into the Lord's House, even now when things are done differently, but yet with the same message, the gospel of Jesus Christ for you.

Let me tell you this: there was a time when I wasn't an every Sunday Church goer. I went off to college and didn't have the opportunity to worship on Campus on Sundays, so I didn't go out of my way to find a church home while i was in college, so I slept in and oh how marvelous it was. Yes, I went to a Lutheran university, I was in chapel each day of the week. I was in the pre-seminary program, but I

didn't attend the Sunday Divine Service. I did not Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy. I think back at that time in my life when I was 19 and 20 and I was missing something. I know I was. I was looking for something in the wrong places. One could say I was even going through the motions of the Christian life, but not really. One could even say that I wasn't living my life worthy of the gospel of Christ.

I've been there. Almost 20 years later, the temptation is still there. The devil continues to work. I encourage you though to stand firm in the gospel. Walk side-by-side with one-another with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Even with this, we are all sinners. Even me as pastor have sinned, i just shared one of those. When sin gets in the way that side-by-side is broken. When I think of being side by side I think of military formations in the time of Jesus. Their shields would be more then side-by-side, their would be no gaps, and when there was a gap, that was the weakness and the enemy would attack. I even watched a television show that showed police officers using their SWAT shields to take their position against people who were shooting at them. One of the members broke rank and they were no longer side-by-side and it cost lives.

When you are not standing firm or striving side-by-side for one reason or another, the devil attacks..sin runs rampant and he can seek to destroy you. Let me tell you this, there is someone that can heal the division, he can bring the shields back together. He does that through repentance, confession, and forgiveness. He does it by the power of the cross. Jesus Christ died for you. He lives again for you. He did that solely for you. He didn't waver from his work. The thing is, He did it alone for you. He walked a road you can never walk. He sacrificed what you cannot for the sins of the world. He sacrificed his glory in heaven to come down to earth in order to sacrifice his very life for you. He suffered immensely for you alone. He did it by himself. He was harassed, humiliated, abandoned by friends, excluded by leadership. He was arrested, imprisoned, beaten, and killed. He was damned, rejected by the Father, and suffered the torments of hell. He did this all for you to heal and to save, to forgive and to restore.

Live in your forgiveness. As you live in your forgiveness you live in the manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. As you live in the forgiveness of your sins you can confidently say with St. Paul... "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." In

life or in death you are the Lord's. St. Paul believed this and he lived it and he encourages the Philippians to live this way and he encourages you as well. I encourage you to live in the manner of life worthy of the gospel of Christ.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

- › Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.