

“Eucharist!”

Philippians 1:3-11

1. Praise

2. Love

3. Prayer

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West Valley Church
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Eucharist!

Philippians 1:3-11

It's a good thing for us to reflect back on what has been accomplished at West Valley Church, to celebrate what's been done, and to give thanks to God for all he has done and is doing in our church.

The Apostle Paul wrote a letter to the church that met in the city of Philippi, and we find it in the Bible; it's called the letter to the Philippians. I'd like to read for us the beginning of that letter – the first eleven verses. Would you mind helping me honor God's Word by standing as it's read this morning? Thank you:

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:1-11, niv)

This is God's Word to us! Thank you – please have a seat.

This letter is very appropriate to read today as we take some time this morning to reflect on and celebrate what we've been able to accomplish at West Valley Church. Let me give you a little background on this letter, and then we will use it as an outline that will guide our own gratefulness to God.

You might remember last week when I talked about how Paul wanted to go into certain countries, but that God closed those doors, then Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia, asking for him to come help them? Remember we said that was sort of like what happened to us when we started our partnership with Victoria

Church in Guyana? Well, when Paul went into the Macedonian region, he started the church in Philippi. Now, a couple years later, Paul is writing them this letter.

At the time that Paul is writing this letter, he is in prison, having been arrested for telling people about Jesus. For many Christians, this letter has become one of the most popular of Paul's letters. Even though it's short, it is packed with powerful theology and a lot of encouraging and challenging words for Christians and churches. But also, it is glowing with love and affection and joy. Paul loved the people of the church in Philippi. They were genuine in their desire to grow in their faith in Christ, they loved each other and were committed to each other, and they were a generous church. When they found out that Paul was in prison, they generously pooled together money and resources and sent it all with a member of their church, Epaphroditus, who was to take them to Paul. But Epaphroditus fell ill, and his delivery was delayed. When he finally reached Paul and delivered everything, the people in the church in Philippi were really concerned about what might have happened to him – they didn't know if he was alive or had been robbed and left for dead or worse, or just what. Epaphroditus felt horrible that his sickness had caused his church family to be stressed about him, so he didn't want to stay long with Paul – he wanted to get right back to his church family that he loved and missed so much. So Paul sent him back, but he didn't miss the opportunity to send a letter back with Epaphroditus to the church, because he loved them so much; this is that letter.

So I wanted to use Paul's opening remarks in his greetings that state his feelings about the church, because I feel the same way about you, West Valley Church! A lot of what Paul says about them, I say about you! I mean that! So let's take a look at it. This section of Paul's letter has usually been called "Thanksgiving," because in it Paul is giving thanks to God for the church in Philippi. The Word for "thanksgiving" in the original language is "eucharisteo (yew-haristayo)" where we get our word "Eucharist" from. That is the traditional word that is used for communion, or the Lord's Supper – Eucharist. This is appropriate, because after we look at Paul's thanksgiving passage, and learn what we have to be thankful for, today we will share together in the Eucharist, or in communion.

There is a sequence to Paul's outline, and it starts with...

1. Praise

Paul takes some time to praise God for them; he says that every time he prays for them, he can't help but thank God. He's filled with joy just thinking about them. It's worth noting that Paul is filled with joy, even though he's in prison. That's because joy for the Christian is not dependent on our circumstances, but on our awareness of what God is doing in our lives and the lives of others. If you want joy, don't focus on your situation – focus on what God is doing. Paul is filled with joy because he is thinking about the partnership in Gospel that the Philippian church has had, from the very beginning.

At the end of next January, I will have been your Lead Pastor for ten years now. Some of you remember that I came on after the church had gone through some very painful and difficult circumstances. It took us a little while to learn to love and trust each other, but we did (most of us, anyway). You were ready to heal and move forward, and that's what we began to do. We agreed together that we were going to pursue God's mission for us on this corner, in order to do what Paul said the Philippians were doing: "partnering together in the Gospel." That word "partner" is a kind of signature word in this letter; it is the word "koinonia." It has two meanings: it means the work they do together for the sake of the Gospel – loving and serving others as they introduce people to Jesus – *and* the mutual love they have for each other while they are doing that. It is both what they do together for the Gospel and how they feel about each other.

That certainly describes you. You have worked together to build partnerships for the Gospel, first with Wide Hollow Elementary School. Nearly from that first year, you began to reach out to them, serving the families of those children by hosting Trunk or Treat – for the sheer joy of simply demonstrating love and hospitality. Our estimate is that you have served, hosted, and blessed over 16,000 people over these years. You began providing backpacks and school supplies each year, the total of which, over the years, is over 1,500 children – over 300 children last year alone. You began Homework Club, assisting children with homework each week of the school year, as they were tutored by people in our church – from teenagers to senior adults. Month in and month out you have provided "First Friday Coffee" for the faculty and staff at Wide Hollow – free espresso drinks from our café. You found that your generosity was even deeper, so you reached out and developed a partnership with Mountainview Elementary, too. We started a small group of about fifteen people in the Mountainview community. As others from our church and from Mountainview have joined in, there are now *two* small groups that meet out there and serve that school – as many as 40 people.

Early on, we took a look at the effectiveness of Upward Soccer and turned it from just some program that we provided, into a relationship that we built and shared with our community. Through everything from coaching to being refs to praying and being number-one-fans, you have served over 4,000 children – not to mention all their families. Altogether you have easily blessed close to 10,000 people, with hundreds of children accepting the love of Jesus into their lives. Last year alone we had over 500 children involved – we were the second largest Upward Soccer program in the world, and we only missed being the largest by less than two dozen kids.

Ten years ago, in my very first year here, again you decided that this beautiful building was just too big and too nice to keep to ourselves, so you started opening your doors to partner ministries in our city, and to groups in our community in ways that serve those in need. Already this year we have hosted events for Ghormley Meadow Christian Camp, Love INC, Life Choices, Toppenish Church of God, Faith TriCities Church Youth Leaders, a Youth Event by Northwest Nazarene University and an NNU Choir and Orchestra Concert, Children's Village, Red Cross Shelter,

Yakima Farmworkers, World Relief, Alzheimer's Association, American Red Cross, Child Evangelism Fellowship, Mountainview Elementary School, along with many groups that use our gym to play basketball, rugby and pickleball. Our spaces are being used to share the love of Christ throughout each week all year long.

Of course, last week we celebrated a significant accomplishment in our five-year partnership with Victoria Church in Guyana, as we dedicated their church and community empowerment center, which is now open and being used. We celebrated the establishment of a large fund for microloans for single parents to learn skills, get an education, and get resources so they can start their own businesses or careers and provide for their children, and the Victoria Church will start providing childcare so the parents can do that. That was an enormous accomplishment as you sent and spent over these last five years a total of over \$250,000. Through your generosity in partnering together in the Gospel – Koinonia – lives are being changed.

So far this year, 12 people have been baptized and we have another service planned for the end of November (if you or someone you know hasn't been baptized, please sign up now!). So far this year we received 17 new members, 19 kids attended children's summer camp at Pinelow, 15 teens attended youth camp and 18 teens attended Nazarene Youth Conference. We were able to send off Pastor Luis & Lisa Rodriguez with a love offering as he enrolled in a chaplaincy residency program, and you gave generously to financially support several missionaries who visited us from different places in Africa, Central America, and the Philippines.

As Paul gave thanks for the people of Philippi and their generosity in sharing the Gospel of Christ, it was easy for his thoughts of thanksgiving to turn to thoughts of...

2. Love

Paul talks about how, even though he is in chains and in prison, he has them in his heart and feels so fondly for them because they share God's grace and love with each other and with him.

You do that too! You love each other so well. You pray for each other week in and week out. More than half of you meet together regularly in classes and in small groups and in gatherings, as you pray for each other, support each other, cry together, laugh together, play together and eat together. Each week during the school year you gather together here for a meal together at Wednesday Night Dinner. Each week you worship together, even though we don't all share the same language or culture. We have Latino and Latina brothers and sisters who worship alongside Anglo brothers and sisters, because we love each other and are committed to Christ.

You volunteer in ways that serve each other, in preparing weekly meals, in worship ministry in the sound booth, as musicians and singers, in the choir and orchestra, in classes, in children's and youth ministries, in Caravan for our children, you volunteer in the office and in the knitting groups and mom's groups and in countless

accountability partnerships. You support us as your pastors and our families through your giving and your prayers and your words of encouragement. You share with us fresh fruit, both raw and in pies! You love us so well, and we love you so very much! You serve one another so well!

Each year we take time to offer a very special recognition to someone in our church family who has really exemplified this kind of service to our church and community. It is called the “Distinguished Service Award.” A donation is given to the work of Missions around the globe in this person’s name, and we receive a beautiful certificate to honor that person.

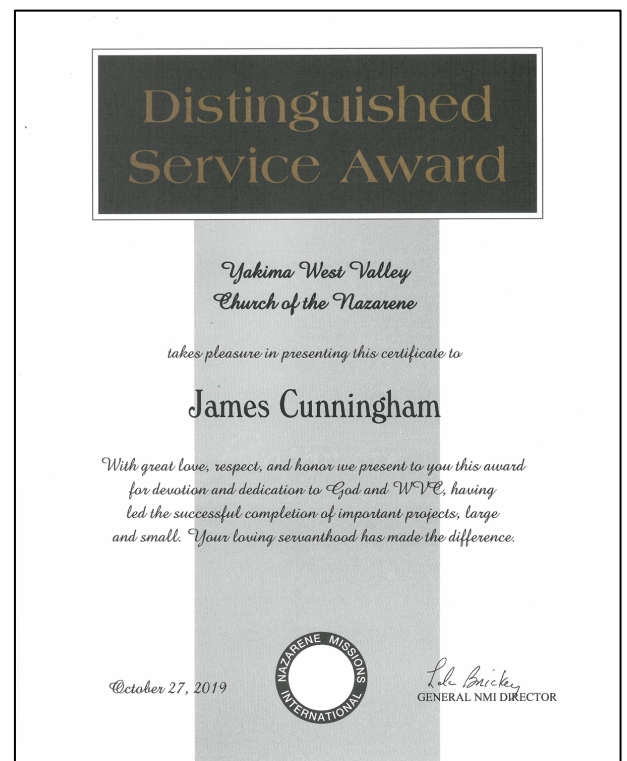
This year it makes perfect sense to give the award to this person. The recipient this year doesn’t know, and I am honored to announce and award it. This person has exemplified service, love, devotion, and leadership. This person has volunteered in countless ways as I’ve mentioned already – serving on dinner teams, serving in and leading small groups, volunteering in our partner schools, in Upward Soccer, on a team to Victoria Guyana, and on the Leadership Team of our West Valley Church. In fact, it is in that last capacity that this person has served most significantly. He has been on the Leadership team for at least eight years.

I’d like to ask Jim Cunningham to please come join me.

Jim serves as Board Secretary, lay-chairman. He is my advisor and confidant. He was on the Exploratory team to Guyana and led in our decision to partner with Victoria. He led the project to renovate our foyer, completing both the work and raising the finances in one year – over \$125,000. He has stood in front of you and let you know of the financial needs of this church numerous times, and you always respond to every need every time, raising additional funds each year from \$10,000 to \$35,000 for repairs and maintenance in this facility. Jim is the first to give and the first to act, time and again.

He is my prayer partner, he is my wise counsel, he is my dear friend. If we could give you a doctorate, this would be it. It may not compare to the numerous medals and accommodations that you were awarded in the Air Force as you served our country, but like those, this is merely symbolic of the incredibly selfless work you have done for Christ and for us over the years.

Jim really represents so many of you. So after Paul gave thanks for the people in the church in Philippi, and expressed his deep love for them, he couldn’t help but express his...



3. ***Prayer*** for them, and neither can I, for you.

I'm telling you: I thank God for you every time I pray for you. I pray with joy for you. I brag about you all the time to all my pastor friends. When I talk to guests here, I tell them, "We have such wonderful people in this church." And you have experienced that yourself, haven't you? Here is my prayer for you – the same passage, but from a different translation of the Bible:

"May God bless you all. Yes, I pray that God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ will give each of you his fullest blessings and his peace in your hearts and your lives.

All my prayers for you are full of praise to God! When I pray for you, my heart is full of joy because of all your wonderful help in making known the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now. And I am sure that God who began the good work within you will keep right on helping you grow in his grace until his task within you is finally finished on that day when Jesus Christ returns.

How natural it is that I should feel as I do about you, for you have a very special place in my heart. We have shared together the blessings of God, both when I was in prison and when I was out, defending the truth and telling others about Christ. Only God knows how deep is my love and longing for you—with the tenderness of Jesus Christ. My prayer for you is that you will overflow more and more with love for others, and at the same time keep on growing in spiritual knowledge and insight, for I want you always to see clearly the difference between right and wrong, and to be inwardly clean, no one being able to criticize you from now until our Lord returns. May you always be doing those good, kind things that show you are a child of God, for this will bring much praise and glory to the Lord." (Philippians 1:2-11, tlb)
Amen!

I *do* pray that your love for each other and for everyone in our community will grow wider and deeper. I do pray that you will know Jesus more deeply and personally in all your understanding of him because he loves you so much. I do pray that you will have the wisdom to always choose what is the highest and best in life for you and for others in your life. I do pray that you will know the Holy Spirit in all his fullness in your life as he makes you holy – more and more like Christ each and every day. I do pray that your life will glorify God, so that all who know you and watch your life will see that it is filled with the love of God in all your actions, in all your speech, in all your interactions, whether in person or on social media!

I do pray that you, West Valley Church, will be more and more to the praise of God's glory!

So, now, having given thanks together in these ways today, we are going to share together at the Lord's table, giving thanks for what Jesus has done for us.

As we prepare:

- Do not have to be a member....
- But need to know this is for believers....
- When we have finished preparing, we will invite you to come forward.
- If you can't, raise your hand – we have people who will come to you.
- Gluten free bread
- Bowls are the gift to us from Victoria church, made of purple heart wood.

Closing comments:

Thank you for being such a loving, generous church. I mentioned last week that you should watch for a letter in the mail from us – if you haven't received it yet, you should get it within the next day or two. If not, we'll have copies available next Sunday. But please be in prayer and prepare to be even more loving and generous, because shortly after the first of the year we are going to commit together to do something powerful, amazing, and supernatural as God works through us, that will have an impact for generations to come.

Now, let me close with this:

Verse 1 – “To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus in Philippi...)

Paul calls them “holy” – first because they are set apart for God and his purposes. West Valley Church: when you have given your life to Christ – you are a Christian – you have been set apart for God and his purposes, not your own.

Then Paul points out why they are holy – because they are in Christ Jesus. It is not their own holiness or goodness; it is the holiness, the goodness of Christ. Paul uses the phrase “in Christ” 165 times in his letters – this is an important concept. He uses it 21 times in the short letter to the Philippians. Obviously, it is a vital concept to understanding what it means to be a Christian. At the very least, it means to be in close, personal union with the crucified and risen Jesus Christ. It also means that they are a committed part of the church – the community of people who are united through their relationship to Jesus Christ – the church. It is the experience of living out their Christian life both individually and together.

But they are not just “in Christ.” Paul says they are God's holy people, in Christ, in Philippi.” This meant much more than a geographical identification; it means, just like as in Christ, they are loving and serving people personally, growing to know them more and more.

Philippi was a Roman colony, populated by many retired roman soldiers. The civic culture and religion were emperor worship. The civilians were expected to be good, patriotic citizens, loyal to Rome. Paul was telling them that their first and deepest loyalty was to Christ, not Rome. That they were to live out their life *in Christ, in Philippi*: that God was calling them to live out their commitment to Christ in the

very place where they lived – in society, in the culture, in the community in which they lived.

Here's the point: Please: as you leave here today, be committed with everything you have in every moment of your life, everywhere you go and everywhere you are for this, West Valley Church: to be God's Holy People, in Christ, in West Valley, Yakima. You are dismissed.