



May 27, 2018

Joy Comes With Help from Friends

Pastor Jason Bryan-Wegner

PHILIPPIANS 2:19-30NRSV

¹⁹I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I may be cheered by news of you. ²⁰I have no one like him who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. ²¹All of them are seeking their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²²But Timothy's worth you know, how like a son with a father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. ²³I hope therefore to send him as soon as I see how things go with me; ²⁴and I trust in the Lord that I will also come soon.

²⁵Still, I think it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus—my brother and co-worker and fellow-soldier, your messenger and minister to my need; ²⁶for he has been longing for all of you, and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. ²⁷He was indeed so ill that he nearly died. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, so that I would not have one sorrow after another. ²⁸I am the more eager to send him, therefore, in order that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. ²⁹Welcome him then in the Lord with all joy, and honor such people, ³⁰because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for those services that you could not give me.

As I prepared for the sermon this week the Beatles kept playing in the back of my head,

“What would you think if I sang out of tune
Would you stand up and walk out on me?
Lend me your ears and I'll sing you a song
And I'll try not to sing out of key
Oh I get by with a little help from my friends”

What's interesting about this song is that it was the only song written for Ringo Starr on the Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club album. But he didn't write it, John and Paul wrote it for him. They kept in mind his limited vocal range to make it sing-able for him. And Paul McCartney gave Ringo quite a bit of coaching to hit that last high note. Apparently, even to sing the song Ringo needed a little help from his friends.

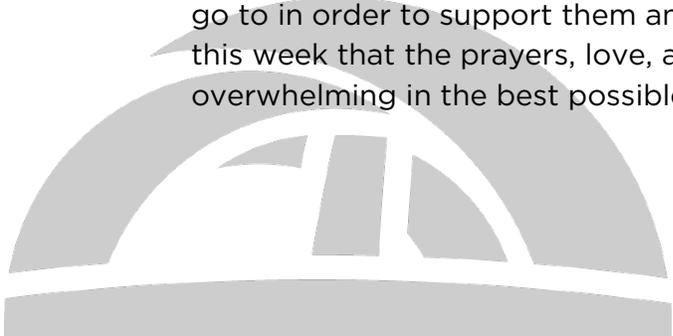


When the Apostle Paul sat in prison - probably in Ephesus - he was in desperate need of a little help from his friends. He met Timothy years before while traveling through Lystra, in modern day Turkey. The word of Christ had already come to Timothy and he became a believer before Paul arrived. He must have shown an eagerness to put his faith into action because Paul urged him to travel with him and Silas on their mission to spread the gospel.

Timothy was as close to Paul as a son who followed in his father's footsteps. Because of their shared faith in Christ and commitment to what God was doing through them they couldn't help but include the other in their inner circle of life. You might understand this kind of relationship if you've ever moved far from home and had to reconstruct all your friendships in a new place; or you've migrated from a the worldview of your family of origin and had to rebuild a community of people who will accept you for who you are. There is something so powerful about that shared experience and the common bond that you can't help but feel like family when it happens. And I mean "family" in the best sense.

Yes, these days "family" can be a loaded term, which is why you hear more people talk about "families of origin" and "families of choice" these days. We could argue the merits and drawbacks of such divisions, but the case remains that people are constructing meaningful community in whatever ways possible because we are created for relationships. Often, these families of choice become people you are willing to do just about anything for because of the common experiences and perspectives shared, like faith or profession. When Paul landed in prison, he needed the help of someone like Timothy to go to the church in Philippi and bring them encouragement and strength, as they feared for Paul's life. It wasn't an easy mission. The travel was dangerous. And Timothy wasn't exactly bringing good news, though I'm sure he would try his best to bring hope in Christ to them, even as they and Paul suffered together. Just the simple act of companionship and presence in the midst of uncertainty and suffering can bring hope and relief.

Many of you are aware that for the last eight weeks Bob and Kristy Giere have been living with the uncertainty of Bob's kidney cancer diagnosis. A week ago, Bob had one of his kidneys removed and on Friday they found out that he is cancer free and needs no further treatment. They are relieved to say the least. And we join them in that relief. Throughout these last several weeks, Bob and Kristy have discovered anew the depths of friendships they have here at Zumbro and in other circles of their lives. They've seen and experienced what lengths people will go to in order to support them and show them they are not alone. Bob said earlier this week that the prayers, love, and support they have received have been overwhelming in the best possible way. The choir has fed them. Musicians have





readily stepped up to ensure that music continues to proclaim the gospel in worship. A team of people even showed up to their house last Saturday to finish staining their deck and do some landscaping before the neighborhood association asked them again if they were going to take care of it.

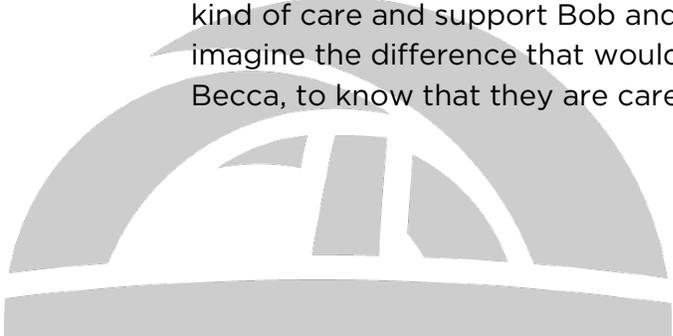
It is not easy to think you have control of everything in life and all of a sudden that sense of control falls out from underneath you. Bob admitted that it has been hard to accept the outpouring of generosity. Like most of us, he's more comfortable giving support than receiving it. But he said, "It's really humbling to know how much people care. It's a sweet release to have that support when I didn't have control. This would have been a much harder time without my brothers and sisters in Christ."

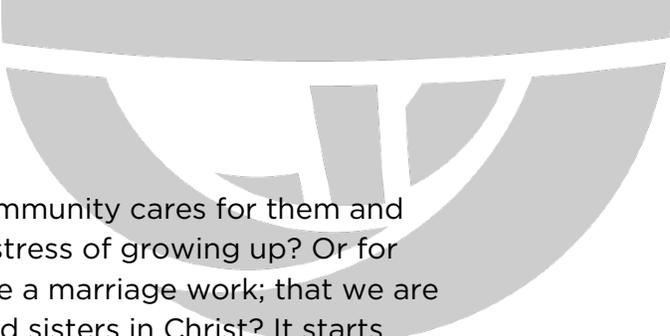
Friends, this is church at its best. We can get caught up in the projects and the programs of the organization. We can measure church or anything we're part of by what we get out of it. What we see in Paul and his friends is a mutuality of giving and receiving, of suffering with and celebrating joy. For most of us, given the number of directions our lives are pulled in, it takes conscious choices to move beyond the quasi-connected world we live in where we are seen, but not really known. I call this the Facebook effect, where it's so easy to catch glimpses of who people are, but rarely know what's really going on in their lives.

Yet, the heart of the church is relationships rooted in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who transforms us into a community where we are called to know one another and called to be known. It's a radically different way of being in our all too fast-paced lives. It requires trust and vulnerability. Yet, it also makes the grace and love of God real and tangible. Like Paul and Timothy, it is Christ's love that forms the common bond we share, and Christ's mission that calls us to walk side by side through the ups and downs of life.

I met with a young couple named Jason and Becca earlier this week. They have been worshiping here off and on for the last several months. They have a 1 and a 3 year old. They both work. They're remodeling a house. Their lives are full. When I asked them what they hope for in a church, they told me it's so important to them to be part of a community that will help them and their kids lay a spiritual foundation for life. We talked about how important relationships in the church are in order to accomplish that.

What would it be like if everyone who calls Zumbro their church home had the kind of care and support Bob and Kristy had in the last several weeks? Can you imagine the difference that would make for our new members, like Jason and Becca, to know that they are cared for and supported in a similar situation? Or for





our youth to sense that more than any other, this community cares for them and their wellbeing as they navigate the challenges and stress of growing up? Or for those who are struggling to make ends meet or make a marriage work; that we are here for them, not only as friends, but as brothers and sisters in Christ? It starts with knowing one another. Even knowing a name. Dale Carnegie's advice in "How to Win Friends and Influence People" was, "Remember that a person's name is, to that person, the sweetest and most important sound in any language." This is why we use the Connection Pads in worship and encourage you to practice the one minute connection each week.

Of course, that's just the start. Dear people of God, we all need a little help from our friends, whether in prison, or starting off in a new stage of life, or recovering from a serious illness or just trying to make it to the next day, we are in this together. And the good news is we belong to a God who comes to us out of love and makes us part of Christ's body, that in Christ we always have a little from our friends. Amen.

