

## **Our Life Together**

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KC New Hope Church of the Nazarene

Pastor Samuel

Having finished our Journey of Grace series, where we heard one common theme throughout our sermons, we will be spending the next 8 weeks diving into Paul's letter to the church in Philippi and the ways he talks about what it means to be one in Christ.

As I looked back on our sermons these past 3 years, I was surprised that Pastor Lisa and I had only spent one or two Sundays in this wonderful book of the New Testament. I was especially surprised because it contains one of the passages that has been formative for our understanding of church and ministry, the kenosis passage of chapter 2 verses 5 to 11. Kenosis is a Greek word that means "self-emptying", which is how Paul describes the posture and attitude which Jesus took in coming to earth as, "he emptied himself by taking the form of a slave and by becoming like human beings. When he found himself in the form of a human, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

This is what we could call the shape of our faith, the shape of the Good News we are called to proclaim, of a God who left everything in order to prepare a way for us to live into the richness of life God has always wanted to enjoy with humanity, with you and me. One of Paul's main points throughout this letter will be that, if Jesus was willing to empty himself, then how much more should we as Christ's church, as those who are walking in the way of Jesus, be willing and ready to enter into this life of kenosis, of setting aside in order to gain unity with Jesus and unity with one another.

Before we get to those big themes, Paul begins with a greeting, a prayer, and a blessing for this church which he loved so much.

***Scripture Reading: Philippians 1:1-11***

***This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.***

### **Point 1: The church is not an organization or a building - the church is God's people in Christ!**

If you ever wanted to get a glimpse into a pastor's heart, all you have to do is read Paul's introductory words in this letter - words full of thanksgiving, love, and care for these people he has not seen in a long time. While Paul would still go on to challenge the people of Philippi in several ways as the letter goes on, there is no doubt about the deep connection he had with the people of this particular church. The people of Philippi

had supported Paul throughout his ministry and provided him with encouragement and partnership.

As I think about the churches where I have had the privilege of serving as a pastor, while I sometimes do think of the difficult times or the joyful times, of specific ministries or events I was involved in, what mostly comes to mind are the faces of the people who I met and ministered with. I think of the Araujo family who always invited us into their home, of the Jimenez family and their love of sports, of the way the Esteps and the Dueys were almost at every church event, and how Pastor Lisa and I got to see Abbie grow up from a high school freshman to having the joy of officiating her wedding a few years ago.

In much the same way, I think it is important to see how Paul in his letter does not refer to the church in Philippi as an institution or as an organization that is meeting or not meeting certain metrics or goals. No, he is addressing the people who make up this church, the people he preached to, taught, and served with, those who he calls “God’s people” or in Greek, “the holy ones” who God is making holy.

This might seem like a simple point, but it is a foundational one for how God calls us to see this body which we refer to as the church. We are not the sum of our ministries or worship services or money raised. We are a group of “holy ones”, a group of sinners who are being made holy by God’s Spirit as we walk together following our Lord Jesus Christ.

And this is why we’re calling this series “Our Life Together.” We want this to be a reminder that belonging to Christ means that we are not being called primarily to enjoy the benefits that come from being in Christ. Instead, as God’s people we are being called to serve God and to serve one another in our life together IN Christ Jesus.

**Point 2: God calls us to be partners in ministry: with God AND with one another**

As Paul continues his letter, he uses several sentences, verses 3 to 8, to convey his thanksgiving for the church in Philippi. Twice he calls them his partners: partners in ministry and partners in God’s grace. The way that Paul uses each of these terms also highlights what he believed to be the role of those who are followers of Jesus Christ. We are not to be consumers or simply recipients but ***co-laborers of the good news of Jesus Christ***, right from the moment we feel and accept that invitation to follow.

Verse 5 shows us that Paul believed that following Jesus was not something a person agreed to at one time and was then set for life. Instead, following Jesus meant being involved in the work of the good news together with God. This is the good news of

salvation in Jesus and God's kingdom being made real here in this life, ***from the moment one starts following Jesus.***

Verse 7 shows us that this partnership means walking with one another through the highs AND the lows of life. Paul was writing this letter while he was under arrest for preaching about Jesus and stirring up all sorts of trouble along the way. Knowing this we can then understand that Paul's thankfulness and gratitude to the Philippians flows out because they had stuck with him when things were difficult as well as when things were going well.

One of our hopes for us worshipping together through our bilingual services on Sunday mornings is so we will find new ways to practice partnering with one another. For a while now we have had two separate congregations worshipping in two separate buildings, each doing things well, each feeling comfortable in their own language and ways of doing things. And I don't doubt that was the way to do things when the makeup of our church was different, when the staff and leaders knew that was the way things would function best. There was a time when the best way to partner together was by worshipping separately.

But things have been changing and we are not that church anymore. Pastor Lisa and I, along with Pastor Edson, Pastor Krista, Alberto and Marisa, our church staff and board feel that we are at a life stage in our congregation where partnership for the Gospel is going to look more integrated, more bilingual, more multigenerational.

So we want to begin to see Sunday mornings as our time to practice together being co-laborers in Christ! We want our time of celebration on Sundays to get us ready for what we pray and hope is the true partnership that goes on once we go out of this building. Because the biggest part of our ministry as a body of Christ will be when we find where God is at work out in our world so that we can join him and each other in ministering to places like: Crestview and Briarcliff Elementary Schools, which are minutes away from us; or Shelter KC, which is a 10 minute drive south; or wherever God leads you during the week.

**Point 3 - Paul's prayer: That the church might focus on what really matters**

Paul closes his greeting in this letter by praying for three things for the people of Philippi: that their love might abound, that they might be kept blameless, and that they might be filled with the fruit of righteousness - all to God's glory and praise. First, Paul's prayer is that the church might grow in love, love of God and love for one another. Second, Paul prays that they might grow in holiness, this calling to live in the power of the Holy Spirit. Third, Paul prays that they might produce, be filled with, the fruit of

righteousness, the fruit which God wants to produce in our lives.

According to Paul, then, what is the church to be all about? **Love, holiness, and righteousness - all to the glory of God!**

One of the things that happens when we have lots of choices for where we can worship on a Sunday morning, is that we start to come up with all kinds of answers to the question, "What is church to be all about?" Sometimes the church becomes all about getting to worship in the style of music that we like best. Sometimes the church becomes all about surrounding ourselves by a certain kind of people, people we feel comfortable with, people we would like to be seen with, people who look and think like us.

But if Paul were to come to New Hope church this morning and look around, I don't think he would be paying attention to those things. I believe Paul would be asking: are people growing in love, in holiness, and producing fruit? Are people partnering together for the gospel of Jesus Christ who might not be otherwise even speaking to each other? Are people focusing on what really matters - doing everything for God's glory and praise?

Sunday mornings, while good for our spiritual growth, can't be the sole time we are seeking spiritual food. This is why we will continue to encourage you to be a part of Sunday School at 9:30 AM on Sunday mornings, or our weekly Bible studies and other discipleship groups we want to start, or our 5:00 AM Wednesday morning prayer time on Zoom. These will all be opportunities for us to grow in love, grow in holiness, and produce the fruit of righteousness, together, helping one another in the journey and inviting new people to join us as well.

What really matters in the end is for us to be united in our work for the gospel, for the good news of Jesus, for a kingdom which is coming but is also already here, transforming lives and calling people to live in the radical love of Jesus Christ.