



# Lexington Presbyterian Church

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## Focus

Luke 14:12-24 & Philippians 4:1-9  
A sermon by William M. Klein

15 October 2017

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. (Phil. 4:1-9 NRSV)

<sup>12</sup>He said also to the one who had invited him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. <sup>13</sup>But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. <sup>14</sup>And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." <sup>15</sup>One of the dinner guests, on hearing this, said to him, "Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" <sup>16</sup>Then Jesus said to him, "Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. <sup>17</sup>At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for everything is ready now.' <sup>18</sup>But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my regrets.' <sup>19</sup>Another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets.' <sup>20</sup>Another said, 'I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.' <sup>21</sup>So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.' <sup>22</sup>And the slave said, 'Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.' <sup>23</sup>Then the master said to the slave, 'Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled. <sup>24</sup>For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner.'" (Lk. 14:12-24 NRSV)

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Jesus told a parable saying that someone gave a great dinner and invited many people. When the meal was ready he told his servant to go find the invited guests and say to them, "Y'all come; dinner's ready." But every last invited guest began to make excuses.

We've been on both ends of this story, haven't we...the inviter and the excuse makers. But I suspect we can all identify more with the excuse makers. We're too busy with important things to attend the dinner...or we are not busy at all, just not particularly

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interested. We open the e-invite and check out the guest list and then decide whether we should attend or not. If this or that person we don't particularly like is going to be there, we will come up with a heart-felt and convincing excuse. Bottom line...attending the feast is not a priority...at least not important enough for us to make the effort to get along with some other guest we dislike...or not as important as whatever else we have going on. We take secondary matters and make them primary ones.

Jesus told the parable hoping it would give religious leaders a segue to rethink their priorities...to focus or refocus their lives. It was crystal clear to him the religious leaders had mistaken secondary things for most important things. The parable suggests that what God wants is for everyone to accept his invitation to make their home in his kingdom...and I think he meant everyone: the poor and the wealthy, the unrighteous and the righteous, the crippled, the lame, the blind, the refugee, the alt-right and the alt-left, the gay, the straight, Republican, Democrat, Libertarian, you, and me.

The parable tells us something about God's joy. It implies that God's joy is complete when we quit thinking up reasons why we can't join the banquet and realize instead that everyone is welcome...everyone...and together we delight in being in his presence.

## 2

We Christians talk and sing and pray about being "one." Every Sunday I pour water into the baptismal font and declare to you these baptismal waters make us one. We then share this fantastic news with one another by saying, "The peace of Christ be with you." On Sundays when we celebrate the Lord's Supper I hold up for everyone to see the bread and the cup and remind us of the goodnews that at the Lord's Table God makes us "one."

We are baptized. We bring our children for baptism. We take and eat the bread of the Lord's Supper. We drink from the cup of the new covenant. But do we let Christ have his way with us? Do we let him make us "one?"

Many times from this pulpit I have talked about our fractured, polarized society. A judgmental attitude is flourishing all across this planet that is vicious, violent, unforgiving, and wrong.

It would be bad enough if this disunity simply described our lives beyond the church walls...in the wider community, in the halls of Congress, and within the league of nations. But a judgmental attitude also describes life within the church. A new church is born every day...which ought to be good news...faithfulness to the Great Commission, right?<sup>1</sup> But nearly 100% of those new churches are formed, not in the course of spreading the gospel, but because of a fight of some sort...irreconcilable differences...the church fractured...the name and cause of Christ tarnished.

In fact, the disunity within churches is a major reason people give for rejecting the church. People within churches deadlocked in conflict get battered and bruised. They mistake secondary things for most important things. Folks on the outside who look at churches deadlocked in conflict justifiably say to themselves, "Wow! What kind of Lord are they serving?"

Week after week Christians file into churches to say their prayers and make their professions of faith. They baptize their children and receive the Lord's Supper. They sing

and pray and say words like “unity” and “fellowship” and “love.” But too often a judgmental attitude, intolerance, and an undercurrent of bickering reveal dimensions of life that remain largely impervious to God’s grace and peace. In order for these behaviors to be changed permanently, something at the level of their core convictions must be permanently changed.<sup>2</sup>

3

Two thousand years ago as Paul drew to a close his letter to the Philippians there was something he felt compelled to address. He names two women – Euodia and Syntyche. Paul must have been a close friend to both women because he did not name enemies in his letters.<sup>3</sup> Along with a woman named Lydia, Euodia and Syntyche were founders of the church at Philippi.

There are two ways to interpret Paul’s admonition to these women who “labored beside him in the work of the gospel.” The more traditional way to understand Paul’s admonition is to suppose these two women were not of one mind with each other about something...and that their difference was the source of disunity in the Philippian church. If this was the case, Paul was eager for these two women and those who may have chosen sides to be at peace with one another...to let the Spirit of Christ make them one.

A second way to understand Paul’s admonition is to suppose it was not Eudonia and Syntyche who had differences with one another. They were in disagreement with Paul. The Apostle could be a demanding person...and so it is not too difficult to imagine the two women were of one mind...and Paul did not share their understanding.<sup>4</sup>

Which interpretation is correct? We can’t know for sure. And Paul does not identify the dispute in question. As much as we would like to know what had them at odds, the point of Paul’s admonition was for Euodia, Syntyche, Paul, and all concerned to make peace...to be one...to live harmoniously for the sake of Jesus, their one Lord.

Paul wanted the whole Christian community to remember what it was like when their faith was new...the joy they shared when they first believed in Christ Jesus.

Well-known preacher, Tom Long, makes that point by suggesting that when Paul’s letter was read aloud in the Philippian congregation it was not the first time Euodia and Syntyche had their names said out loud in worship. Their names were said aloud when they were baptized. “I baptize you, Euodia. I baptize you, Syntyche.” Long believes Paul was not calling them *down*. He was calling them *up* to their baptismal identity.<sup>5</sup> He was calling them and him to have one mind – i.e., the mind of Christ...and to be one body – i.e., the body of Christ.

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Tom Long has given us a good way to get unstuck when we find ourselves in times of conflict with one another. Remember your baptism...and before long you may just find yourselves rejoicing in the Lord.

Paul knew that in spite of disagreements taking place within the Philippian congregation, they really did love the Lord. They wanted to be one in Christ. But he knew that being one in Christ requires effort and prayer and mutual forbearance. The blessings that come to a unified congregation are many...but that kind of unity is a labor of love.

Jesus said, "When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind." His point was that both our daily bread and the bread we will eat in the

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kingdom of God are a gift. No one can repay these incredible gifts. Rich or poor, healthy or sick...we all come with empty hands.

Paul told the Philippians what he must have told himself again and again. "In order to understand what Christ had in mind, spend time thinking about whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, and commendable. Think about these things because they are the things Jesus thought about and put into practice. Think about whatever is excellent or worthy of praise. Think about these things, listen, remember your baptism, let Christ have his way in your hearts, and the God of peace will be with you.

What could happen if we followed Paul's advice...if we committed to memory and wrote Paul's words upon our hearts! I dare say our witness would be like a great light shining throughout this community. People would never be left wondering who we serve...nor what kind of people we are precisely because we serve Jesus. They would not need written statements about what we oppose or support...for they would be able to see for themselves that we, though many, are one body in the one Lord, Jesus, our Master. Amen.



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#### Endnotes:

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<sup>1</sup> See Matthew 28:19-20.

<sup>2</sup> Halstead, Elizabeth S. et. al. 2010. Dwelling with Philippians: A Conversation with Scripture through Image and Word. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub., 124.

<sup>3</sup> Sakenfeld, Catharine D. ed. 2007. D-H. *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 2. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 356.

<sup>4</sup> Dykstra, Laurel. 2011. "Euodia and Syntyche," from [www.sojo.net](http://www.sojo.net) for Proper 23, Year A. Sojourners 2401 15th Street NW Washington DC 20009.

<sup>5</sup> Halstead, 197. Citing Tom Long, a sermon from January 27, 2005.