

## ***SERMON ~ BIBLE READING: PHILIPPIANS 2:25 -30; 4:14-19***

Paul really loved the church in Philippi. Remember how he helped to found it – remember how he met Lydia and other Jewish women by the river and shared the Good News of Jesus with them and how they became Christians and the first members of the church in Philippi; remember how, in the all-powerful name of Jesus, he freed a slave girl of an evil spirit and from slavery, an act of compassion and deliverance which landed him in prison; and remember how he was miraculously released from prison and how that miraculous release led to the jailer and his family becoming Christians and members of the growing church in Philippi. The Philippian Christians were a caring church family who were grateful to Paul, who loved him sacrificially, boundlessly and unconditionally and who practised hospitality. When you're back home, get your Bibles out and turn to Acts chapter 16 where you can read all about the founding of the church in Philippi.

Paul is now in prison or under house arrest in Rome and the Philippian Christians want to show their love and concern for Paul. They have already prayed for him, but they want to do more. So they send one of their number, a guy called Epaphroditus, all the way to Rome (*show the slide of the map of Philippi and Rome – as you can see there are three main routes from Philippi to Rome, but we have no idea which route he takes*) to offer care and support to Paul and to share in his ministry. (*Blank screen*)

Epaphroditus takes with him many generous gifts, and this visit is obviously a great joy to Paul. It is somewhat marred by the fact that Epaphroditus takes seriously ill (maybe as a result of the journey or some other cause), risks his life and nearly dies, a cause of much anxiety for both Paul and the Christians in Philippi. But in the end Epaphroditus is able and eager to return to Philippi. These Christians are generous, brave, imaginative and sacrificial – and Paul recognises this. Indeed, the whole letter is brimming with warmth and appreciation from Paul towards the Philippian Christians. He is so grateful for a church which is characterised by such warmth and care, everyone giving to everyone else.

Here was a love that flowed from a commitment to be like Jesus whose sacrificial love knew no bounds, whose sacrificial love meant setting aside the privileges of deity and coming among us as a slave, whose sacrificial love

brought him to his knees to wash his disciples' feet, whose sacrificial love led to a selfless, obedient death on a cross for us.

So the challenge for us, a church family with so much warmth and love, so much pastoral care, so much of everyone giving to everyone else – the challenge for us is to offer pastoral care which flows from the same source – Jesus' sacrificial love which knows no bounds; the challenge for us is to offer pastoral care which is motivated, not by the hope of winning acceptance with God or helping those who 'need to be needed', but by the desire to see people grow in their relationship with God. Pastoral care flowing from Jesus' sacrificial love which knows no bounds and motivated by the desire to see people grow in their relationship with God will be a shining example for the world.

Teach us, Good Lord, to love and not to count the cost; to love and not to heed the wounds; to love and not to ask for any reward, save that of knowing that we do your will. Through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen.

### *GOING DEEPER*

Questions on the Bible passages, Philippians 2:25 -30 and 4:14-19, and on the sermon for you to think about, either on your own or in a small group:

1. To what extent is the giving of non-monetary gifts part of the ministry of your church?
2. How do you go about giving those who serve the Lord a cheerful welcome (v 29)?