

Distractions. How much time do we spend thinking – now what was I doing? Because we just got distracted. I am so easily distracted – focusing is hard, paying attention when I'm not truly invested or interested, forgetting what I was doing, losing my place, having my mind wander – all this has happened this morning. Getting distracted is a constant struggle of mine. Which is why I like the Apostle Paul. He often seems a bit distracted and all over the place when he writes. He abruptly changes a topic on occasion or strings together things that don't necessarily have anything to do with each other. For instance in verses 2-9 of Philippians 4 – which is where we'll spend the morning. The verses don't connect and appear as though Paul has gotten distracted – bored of one topic or lost his train of thought or just figured before he forgot he better just tell them. He mentions 3 very different set of circumstances, and each of them have their own separate solution. But, the more I meditated on these verses the more I began to think that Paul wasn't distracted – the Philippian church was. Or, maybe more to the point Paul was concerned that they would become distracted.

But, as is the case with me – while preparing this message this week I got distracted – in a completely different way than the church or Paul. I was in chapter 4 to look at verse 8 and then got distracted by verse 6, which is one of my all time favorite verses – I have like 100 of them – and then I got super distracted by verses 2 and 3 which I had literally never paid attention to ever in my life – including the year we studied Philippians in Bible Quiz – and I now have spent a full week thinking about 2 women I'd never heard of and one thing led to another and to another and to another – as I am known to do when trying to study or accomplish one thing. And, what we have here is a super deep dive into Philippians 4:2-3. So today we'll only cover 1 of the 3 distractions that were lurking then and now in the church and what Paul suggests as a solution for them. We'll look at the other 2 next Sunday.

The letter to the church at Philippi is written while Paul is in prison in Rome. And, it's written to a church that is also suffering opposition. Yet, Paul writes to them about rejoicing, being joyful and content in all situations, not being anxious or worried, and about living FOR Jesus, LIKE Jesus and in a manner that is worthy OF Jesus. Paul wasn't writing to people who had it easy, had no problems, or who lived in a God honoring society where everyone worshipped God. In fact, no New Testament book was written to people with that type of experience. What's more

all the New Testament writers encourage their readers to live for Jesus despite what was happening in the culture around them and to live in light of the fact that Jesus was returning soon.

For that reason, I think Paul wasn't so much distracted himself as he was finishing this letter but was once again encouraging those at Philippi to not get distracted themselves because The Lord is near – meaning His return was soon at hand. That's actually the type of distraction I want to continue to call our attention to this morning. **Don't get distracted: The Lord is coming soon.**

The distraction we want to look at today is the distraction of disagreement. So, let's look at these verses.

"I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life." Philippians 4:2-3

Here we learn that there has been an argument or a disagreement between these two women. Maybe it was on how to pronounce Syntyche's name because if you google it there is no real consensus. People can be very sensitive about their name. I hate when people leave off the "h" on my name. Spell it right, ok? We have no idea what this disagreement was about, but presumably the congregation did because Paul felt the need to address the situation head on. Now imagine, travel is not so easy at this time. Word had not reached Paul about this disagreement via airmail. No one picked up the phone, sent a text, facetime'd him while the argument was happening. No, the church had sent support and gifts to Paul in prison via Epaphroditus. We can assume that he then filled Paul in on what was happening. Then, he got sick while with Paul. Word reached Philippi about his sickness, and they then sent word back about their concern. I mean in fairness he nearly died. Now Paul has taken time to write a letter to send back to the church with a fully restored and healed Epaphroditus to address a disagreement between Euodia and Syntyche. Think how much time had elapsed. This was not something small or insignificant. Not something ridiculous they were already over by the time the letter arrived.

This is more on par with the disagreements of the last few years in our own time. Maybe one wore a mask and the other didn't. Maybe one changed their political party affiliation and the other voted differently. Or, maybe one put broccoli in every single dish she brought to the church knowing full well the other one hated broccoli. Because it's disgusting. And, it's a contaminator food. You can't pick broccoli out of anything, Euodia. Once it's in it's everywhere. People put in salads. Why? They ruin mixed vegetables – umm, do you mean you mixed broccoli bits all over my squash? And, I understand that broccoli is a main ingredient for broccoli rice casserole but it seems to me you just messed up a perfectly good Cheesy rice casserole. Just sayin. It's not like peas – peas are nasty but you can pick them out of anything. Broccoli contaminates and ruins friendships in the church if you're not careful.

Here's the other key piece of information we have about these 2 women – they were mature believers and key leaders in the church. The scripture says they were co-workers, who had been by Paul's side in the preaching of the gospel. The church at Philippi had been started by Paul years before and had initially met in the home of a business woman, Lydia. Paul clearly knows Euodia and Syntyche well. They had worked alongside him to build the church. They're both still following Jesus so this isn't a doctrinal issue, no one is teaching false doctrine or heresy – because Paul has no trouble calling that out in other letters about other believers, and neither one have left the faith. We're told that both of them still have their names written in the book of life. This wasn't a I can no longer have fellowship if you're going to walk away from faith and now we disagree sort of a problem. This is 2 mature in their faith, Christian women who have disagreed about something that does not have any bearing on eternity. And Paul pleads with them to come together in the Lord.

Unity in the body of Christ has been a key theme in this letter. In chapter 1 he wrote, **“Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ...stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.”** Philippians 1:27-28 And, in chapter 2 he said, **“Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life.”** Philippians 2:14-16

Unity within the church among believers was important then and it's important now because there is a real enemy and it's not our brothers and sisters in Christ who think differently about covid or politics or broccoli. There is real opposition to the kingdom of God but hear me – don't get distracted thinking the enemy is sitting on your row because they vote differently. There is an enemy prowling around seeking those he can devour and you're upset cause Euodia put broccoli in the mixed veggies. Satan wants nothing more than to have us fighting and upset and too hurt from the wounds of friends to be able to stand, unified, together, in one spirit against him and the opposing forces of evil.

Unity among the believers was also how their witness would shine so bright – like stars in the universe. But it's hard to shine bright when you're yelling and fighting and those outside of the church are afraid to come in. Afraid they'll leave angry and upset too. The way for a crooked and depraved generation to see Jesus is for Euodia and Syntyche to get it together – apologize like they mean it and come together in the Lord so that they can shine bright for Jesus in a dark world. They were distracted by something that did not matter enough to even be written down. What mattered was unity, because the Lord was coming soon and there was a lost and dying world that needed to know about Jesus and it would take a unified church in order to win them. Unity in the body of Christ is still important and I'm afraid we're not prioritizing it as we should. This is a hard word and I know how you feel cause it was a hard word for me all week. I turned to this chapter to speak on verse 8 and instead God imprinted verses 2 and 3 so deeply in my heart that I've been a little annoyed. You're hearing this message one time and then headed to lunch and I've dealt with this for days! Cause I owe Euodia an apology and I don't want to. Cause I'm right about the broccoli and she should apologize to me, recognize that I was right all along and act the same as me.

Euodia and Syntyche weren't going to agree on every issue – no one ever agrees on every issue. It wasn't about getting them to see the issue from the same perspective or convincing Euodia that broccoli was gross. How boring if we all thought the same. But, for the sake of unity among the believers, for the sake of reaching the lost, for the sake of spreading the Gospel, for the sake of a united front against the real devil Paul implores them to find common ground and settle the dispute in Christ.

In fact, the only way they would be able to settle this was because of their faith in the Lord. That's what Paul appeals to here. He's used this phrase, "In the Lord," in similar fashion 9 times in the letter. In 1:14 he recognizes that his chains have given others courage to speak of Jesus and this only happens "in the Lord." In chapter 2 he hopes in the Lord, is confident in the Lord regarding future plans. In chapter 3 and 4 he says we should rejoice in the Lord and in chapter 4 to remain confident in the Lord. Speaking of Jesus while the threat of imprisonment looms, hoping and trusting that you'll get out of prison and be able to travel, having joy in the face of persecution, opposition, and suffering, remaining confident and standing firm in your faith when everything around you screams of the exact opposite reality, and reconciling with brothers and sisters in Christ after a falling out – none of that makes sense, none of that is easy, most of that is simply not even possible unless it's done "In the Lord."

As Americans we are divided on everything. Every poll on every topic is split 50/50. Even whether or not you believe in the accuracy of the poll is divided 50/50. You can read the comments on any Facebook post and you'll find that agreement is not a thing. The church is made up of people. We disagree on all those same issues. I mean we all love Jesus but some of you eat broccoli of your own choosing because you actually like it. I don't get that! So, what I'm telling you is that the only way for the church to be different than the world – the only way to shine bright to a dark world, the only way for us to not get distracted from what really matters – is to agree with each other in the Lord. In our own ability, our own thinking, our own humanity we'll just get angry at each other and remain angry at each other and become ineffective in reaching a crooked and depraved generation – but with the Lord's help, in His strength, looking to Him we can love one another, we can have unity, we can come to an agreement.

Paul instructed the church at Philippi, **"If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to**

the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.” Philippians 2:1-5

Some commentators think perhaps Euodia and Syntyche were the specific example of the more general point he was making in those verses. Humility was not something the ancient Greeks valued. In fact, in the temple of Apollo in Delphi, were inscribed 147 maxims – things like “know thyself” humility doesn’t make the list. However, **“Within decades of Paul’s letter to the Philippians Christians were regularly emphasizing ‘humility’ as a central characteristic of the ethical life.” – John Dickson in “Humilitas”** As believers we act and live and behave differently. The world may not value humility – the world may not be able to humble themselves and think of others – put themselves in other’s shoes, consider another way, listen and respect and value others. But, we live and act differently than the world. We value others above ourselves in humility because we want to be like Jesus. We don’t have to be right, have the last word, or finish every argument with a mic drop moment – and that is so hard because I love doing everything I just said. But, I love Jesus more and I want to be like Him. Not looking to my own interest but caring about others more. In our relationships with each other – our brothers and sisters, the people we worship alongside, serve beside, greet at the door, pray in agreement for healing, come to the Lord’s table and receive grace with – we want to have the same mindset as Christ Jesus – who humbled himself all the way to the cross. Paul didn’t want to Euodia and Syntyche to think like or behave like each other – he wanted them both to think and act like Jesus. Paul never asks one to concede to the other. He never chooses a side. He appeals to them both equally to agree in the Lord. To be like Jesus. The way to become unified as a church is to have the same attitude as Jesus. It was true for the church in Philippi, it’s true for Carbondale, it was true for Euodia and Syntyche and it’s true for me and for all of us.

Then in one of those distracted Paul moments he jumps from this plea for agreement to tell them, **“Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.” Philippians 4:5** Don’t get distracted by arguments with other believers – because the Lord is near. Paul is reminding all of us that the Lord’s appearing is soon. If it won’t matter in heaven then don’t lose a friend over it here. I’m always up for a good argument – just tell me what position to argue for – I’m in. I just love to argue. But, I don’t want to lose my friends for the prize of winning an argument or being

right. Instead, because the Lord's return is so close, Paul tells us to be gentle. It's fruit that comes from a Spirit filled life. Be kind, watch your tone, speak with gentleness. Because life is short and eternity is long and Jesus is coming back soon.

This morning I want us to catch **The importance of unity in the body of Christ:**

It unites us against the real and present threat of the enemy of our souls

We shine brighter in a dark world when we're unified

Unity among believers is only possible in the Lord and with His help

In humility we value others so we can have unity

Arguing will distract us from the reality that Jesus is coming soon

Paul suggests another trusted third party, a true companion or a loyal yokefellow, might be able to help Euodia and Syntyche learn how to agree again in the Lord. Sometimes we need an unbiased observer to step in and help us remember what's really important and what's really at stake. I'm just a loyal yokefellow imploring us at Carbondale to do the same. I'm not asking anyone to change their mind, their political party, or their personal opinions. I'm just asking us to come together in Jesus and love one another, care for one another, prefer one another, and act like a united family. If you've hurt or been hurt, disagreed, been upset with a brother or sister in this place – for the sake of Jesus would you make it right today and commit again to doing what Paul said – to consider others and look not only to your own interests but the interests of others. We don't all have to like broccoli but we all need to love each other.

I want us to stand so that you'll be prepared to turn around and hug someone or encourage someone with a kind word after we pray.

Let's ask the Lord to search our hearts and show us where we need to be more like Him – where we need to find agreement in the Lord with someone we know – where we need to be more gentle. To help us not get distracted by conversations, arguments and positions that don't really matter in light of eternity. And, let's ask the Lord to strengthen the unity of this church so that Carbondale can shine bright with the love of Jesus to our community and our city. Let's commit ourselves to love one another.

Let's pray.