

March 8, 2009
 Messiah
 Lent 2-B (Final Sermon at Messiah)

Philippians 1:3-11
I Thank My God

Introduction

1. Dear Baptized in Christ,
2. This is kind-of a unique farewell
 - a. This is my last official sermon with you, and yet I'll be preaching the Lenten Midweeks, Holy Week, and on Confirmation Day
 - b. I'm leaving Messiah as your pastor, and yet I'm staying as a member
3. But the fact remains, that as of today, I will no longer be your pastor, and I would like to take this time to say some personal things that are on my heart
4. We've experienced many things together
 - a. Moving the pastor from a parsonage to his own home
 - b. Feeling together the heartaches and joys in raising our children
 - c. Experiencing deaths and funerals that have brought much pain
 - d. Planning meetings, and goal setting, and objectives
 - e. Rewriting a Constitution and Bylaws and Handbooks
 - f. Establishing new traditions like our Advent Preparation Celebration and Ethnic Feast, and our Women's St. Lucia Christmas Party
 - g. We've worked together to upgrade our instruments of worship: a beautiful organ and piano, and now handbells that are 1/2-way funded
 - h. We've witnessed our chancel beautified with paraments that are breath-taking
 - i. We've called a second full-time church worker
 - j. And, we've added on an almost \$1 million facility
 - k. Working together on these things has brought about a special and wonderful relationship between pastor and people
5. In my approximately 1,056 sermons I have preached from this pulpit, hardly ever have I not preached from one of the Readings of the day – but today I have chosen Philippians 1:3-11, as St. Paul writes to a congregation whom he loved:

3 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. 6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. 7 It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. 8 For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. 9 And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, 10 so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

- I. **St. Paul begins, “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you”**
 - A. In large part – this is what I want to say to you today – “Thank You!”
 - i. For the last couple of weeks many of you have expressed kind words and thanking me for various aspects of my ministry here...
 - ii. But what you may not realize – is that you have taught me so much, you have given me so much – of which I thank God in all remembrance *of you*
 - B. In my first year here – I was a little more gullible than I am now
 - i. A man came to our church and gave me his bad-luck story
 - ii. I felt so bad for him that I took him to JC Penney and bought him new clothes, I provided him with a meal, and I gave him money
 - iii. Later I found out that I was “had” and I went and talked to the Human Care Committee (we had “committees” in those days)
 - iv. I was out about \$300-400 dollars of my own pocket – and Jim McKenzie insisted that I be reimbursed out of the Human Care Account
 - v. I felt so humbled, and so loved
 - vi. Thank you, Jim, for teaching me “human care” that I took with me into the rest of my ministry
 - C. Our elders study the Book of Concord for an hour before most of our meetings
 - i. The Book of Concord is our Lutheran Confessions – and our elders have grown in their understanding of Lutheranism which has been a great asset to this congregation
 - ii. One night we were meeting, and we were studying the article of Justification, the doctrine that we are saved solely by the grace of God in Christ Jesus
 - iii. Then Leon, who is quick to make a Norwegian joke from time to time said, “Now I know why Lutherans are so stubborn.”
 - iv. And I looked at him and waited for the punch line
 - v. And then he said, “Because they have so much to defend.”
 - vi. Thank you, Leon, for teaching me to appreciate the Gospel all the more, and helping me to remember how important it is to preach Christ crucified
 - vii. And also, in my first few weeks here, 16 years ago, for bringing the donuts and coffee to my office after one of your days of teaching, and just talking about stuff and making me feel so welcomed

- D. When I came to Messiah, there were some who believed I was a perfectionist – and would rib me about it
- i. But then I found out these three women, who would rib me, were more perfectionists than I was
 - ii. Jackie who stitched every parament and stole with precise care
 - iii. Jan who filled the candles, watered the poinsettias and lilies to make them last more than a month – that’s a miracle in my eyes
 - iv. And Colleen who often said it didn’t matter, but would make sure each nativity figure was just in the right place
 - v. But Jackie, Jan, and Colleen – as I watched you do your work, you taught me again the holy reverence of the Lord’s house and how we offer our best to the Lord
 - vi. Not to mention, from Colleen, a true appreciation for Scandinavian hymns, and how to be most hospitable
- E. There’s a man I got to know better this past year – I didn’t realize his hidden talents and his gifts of working with people
- i. In our building project, Vern made sure everyone in the congregation was informed, he wanted a unified project
 - ii. He spent hours with John, working the numbers to give us our best value
 - iii. And when we went together to talk to the sound system people, I sat back and marveled at his gift of dealing with people, and enjoyed watching him get Messiah the best deal
 - iv. Vern, you taught me all the more to give people their due respect, to be down to earth with people, whether its people in the church or outside the church
- F. There were days when I didn’t feel like coming to a meeting – I was tired, and my sinful flesh just wanted to be lazy
- i. And then when I got to these meetings, I saw the sacrifices of all of you in serving the Lord
 - ii. Jerry would walk in limping, with his body aching, and yet he would sit in the choir or come to an elder’s meeting
 - iii. Pat would rush in from his work, his boots and pant legs having the “aroma” of cow manure, or his fingers bandaged up from being pushed around by a strong bull
 - iv. John would be on site this past year when he could barely walk and almost looked like he couldn’t stand the pain in his back
 - v. Jerry, and Pat, and John – you have taught me dedication and faithfulness to the Lord and His church, as I watched you being SO faithful to the Lord and His Church

- G. And I marvel at the sincerity of being Christian, and the hours of time spent in this place in serving the Lord
- i. For Jerome's steady and faithful leadership
 - ii. For Jan picking up other ladies for Bible study who needed help with their walkers or canes
 - iii. For Bob and Lillian, in their humility, in dealing with finances or arranging flowers for the Lord's house
 - iv. For Dan Rhoden's hours on the lawn mower on his day off, or climbing high ladders to change a lightbulb when he was afraid of heights
 - v. For Jo's late-night hours during Holy Week, or Christmas time, or annual report and just doing a great job week after week
 - vi. For Renae, and Myrna, and Kathy (and other organists and musicians we've had in the past) countless hours practicing in order to edify God's people with our Church's hymns and liturgy
 - vii. For the countless hours of time spent by every member of the choir, putting up with my "anxiety" before Concert time, for spending hours in church during holy week – and producing sounds that are heavenly
 - viii. For Rod's time and patience with a computer-illiterate like me, and yet through his gifts and generosity, he has made my ministry easier (and to think that when I first got here I told Greg Schuchard I didn't need a computer)
 - ix. For Dick and Donna Ames – for their love of the Word, for countless hours putting our church's history into albums, and for silently coming into the church and fixing something that needed repair
 - x. To all of you – thank you for teaching me so much and making my ministry among you so joyful and fulfilling
- H. There's another man for which I am truly thankful
- i. There's a man (and his family) that if you asked him to take a major role in VBS – he went all-out to provide the greatest learning experience for the kids
 - ii. There's a man, who when asked to be a head elder – took the job seriously and was sincere and prepared (even if his wife helped him with agendas and reports)
 - iii. There's a man, who when asked to represent us at a district or synodical convention – poured hours over his materials, read his material while on break from the dragline, and prepared to vote most informed for our good
 - iv. And there's a man, who would walk into pastor's office and ask how HE was doing, and his family; though once in a while on April Fool's the pastor's office would strangely re-arranged... or missing

- v. And Steph and Kristi, faithful young women in the church, where even a wheel chair did not hinder faithfulness to the Lord
 - vi. Roger – thank you for teaching me to take my job to heart, and to pour myself into my service for the Lord, and to find humor and joy in doing it
- I. It is certainly not my intention to leave anyone out
- i. for as I look around and see your faces, I can think of countless stories, countless times you have served, countless times we have worked together in the kingdom of God
 - ii. But the stories I have shared is my way of showing you how thankful I am for you, and what ALL of you have taught me
 - iii. But there's just a few more I would like to mention...
- J. There's a man in this congregation to whom I am very indebted; everyone has been given various gifts – and this man was given the gift of wisdom
- i. Before he became a member here he befriended me; and though later on we began taking turns paying for lunch, even in our lunch tabs, I am indebted
 - ii. His father was a pastor, and knew the life of being a pastor and a pastor's family
 - iii. His father was a Christ-centered pastor – and knew the things of which I spoke in terms of stewardship, and Christ living in us
 - iv. In his own field of work, Roger Drevlow was and is highly respected as a leader, an encourager, a planner
 - v. And he would spend hours with me, often times at Minerva's, and give me wisdom, help me smoothen out the roughness on my edges, and give me Christ-centered advise and encouragement in my ministry
 - vi. And even when he wasn't talking, I watched how he led and copied him; asking questions, loving people, serving Christ
 - vii. Various situations in my ministry for one reason or another have been more painful than other situations: the death of Sandy Donat, members transferring out, and Roger's stroke, which was just one year ago this weekend
 - viii. And his wife, Joanne, a soldier of the cross, putting herself on the front lines in building a school and making it excellent in education, in the arts, and being Christ-centered – and not always being recognized for all her behind-the-scenes contributions
 - ix. Sometimes I felt guilty that these two have ministered to me more than I thought I should be ministering to them
 - x. And so, Roger and Joanne, I thank my God for you, for in part – you have shaped and formed me to be the pastor I am today,

and taught me that, well, “it’s not about me... it’s about Jesus Christ”

- K. And my parents and family are here
 - i. Family is important
 - ii. Pastor Marcis just gave a presentation to the pastors about who has the greatest spiritual influence on a person’s life
 - iii. It’s probably not hard to guess that it is the family – even when the children want to rebel for a time in their teenage years
 - iv. It is an eternal gift parents give to their children when they bring them to the font of baptism, when they bring their children to Sunday School and Lutheran Day School, when they help their children learn their memory work and teach them their prayers at home, and when they insist on consistent worship in church
 - v. Those times helping my mom wash communion ware, or the time I can remember my dad hearing my memory work in the living room...
 - vi. This is what my parents did, and so, mom and dad – I thank you for bringing me up in the faith as a child

- L. And you may have noticed that there is a person and group of people I have not yet mentioned – because they are of most importance to me
 - i. Though I often fail as a husband, and don’t “talk” as much as I should and share my feelings...
 - ii. Myrna is the love of my life, and has been God’s gift to me, she has been the Rock in our marriage and family, a faithful mother to my children, and help and support to me, and a true servant of this church – thank you, Myrna
 - iii. And my children – whom I also love with all my heart – of whom I am proud and thank God for you every day!

So, I have spent much time expressing my thanks to God for all of you. But since this is my last “official” time in this pulpit – I’ve just got a few more things to say, so re-adjust your sitting, and lend me your ears for a short time more...

II. I like St. Paul’s words to the Philippians, “It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace...”

- A. That’s the key to our relationships, isn’t it – being partakers of God’s grace, being brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus
 - i. Paul’s preaching in Philippi was one of SIN and GRACE
 - 1. He preached God’s Word that of our own – we are sinful and unclean; we are in the darkness of sin and death
 - 2. Without God’s grace – there is no love, only selfishness; there is no bond of caring for one another, only caring for

- oneself; there is no being thankful for one's friendship, but only enmity and hatred and jealousy
3. That's who we once were – all of us!
 4. And that's why we're so stubborn – because we have the Gospel to defend – the Gospel that covers us and makes us clean and takes us to heaven
- ii. Do you ever think to yourself, "why did Pastor pick *that* hymn?"
1. The hymn you just sang, "Church of God, Elect and Glorious" speaks of who we are in Christ
 2. You have heard thousands of words come out of my mouth – but I pray, to your dying moment – that what is first and foremost in your mind is this:
 3. That you are a new creation in Christ!
 4. That you are no longer dead in sin, but alive in Christ Jesus!
 5. That you are no longer in the darkness of sin, but in the Light of Christ!
 6. That you are no longer destined for hell, but an heir of heaven!
 7. That you are no longer damned and cursed, but holy and forgiven!
 8. That you are a new creation in Christ; an 8th day Christian, a Child of Christ's Easter, blameless in the sight of God because of our Savior, Jesus Christ!
 9. That is no longer you who lives, but Christ lives in you!
 10. That's what the hymn talked about...
 11. And this is who you are! Don't forget! Take it to heaven with you!

III. I fear dark days ahead

- A. I will be so bold to say our nation's leaders is only evidence of Satan being unleashed and the days of tribulation becoming more difficult
- i. The leadership of our country advocates killing babies before they are born
 - ii. They advocate homosexuality
 - iii. They advocate pressures on Christianity
 - iv. They advocate roadblocks for the family
 - v. They advocate less religious freedom and more worldly philosophies
- B. How I wish I could remain in this pulpit and speak words of hope and forgiveness to you if these dark days come to fruition
- i. But that would be conceited of me – to think I alone possess the Gospel
 - ii. While the horizon of our world looks dim – the Gospel of Jesus Christ continues to shine brightly

- iii. We are not a people without hope – we are a people saved by God, and living in His presence every day
- iv. With your vacancy pastor, and eventually your new pastor → they will continue to proclaim God's presence to you in this dark and troubled world
- v. They will proclaim peace and hope and joy in the presence of Jesus Christ
- vi. They will wash your babies clean with baptism, they will feed your souls with God's Body and Blood, and they will grace your ears with the Word of God
- vii. For in all these – God is present!
- viii. In all these – God is forgiving!
- ix. In all these – God is leading His people forth into heaven for all eternity!

C. And so, to repeat the words of St. Paul, "It is my prayer that your **love** may abound more and more, with knowledge and **discernment**, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ"

- i. You have a bond of peace other congregations crave
- ii. You have a unity in the Gospel other congregations covet
- iii. You have a love for one another that other congregations dream about
- iv. And this has all come because of Jesus Christ – and His Word and Sacraments
- v. Don't give up the Word, continue in the Word, be in Worship, study the Scriptures together, encourage one another on, work toward continued unity, and remember who you are – the baptized children of God in Christ Jesus
- vi. And the world and Satan can NEVER strip that from you!

Conclusion

1. 1/3 of my life I have spent growing up in Green Bay, WI – thus being a cheesehead (if only I could have converted more of you)
2. 1/3 of my life I have spent in college, seminary, and the first five years of ministry in MN
3. And 1/3 of my life I have been with you – a marvelous 1/3
4. Once I was your pastor, but now I am your friend
5. I am humbled to have served you, and I praise God for the privilege of being with you
6. And I thank my God in all my remembrances of you.
7. In the name of Him who is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Amen.