

Let us pray

Lord Jesus Christ

By the power of your presence

Open the mind of God to us,

That in your light we may see light

And in your strength be strong.

Amen.

Back in the 1990's we used to sing a song in Sunday school that started Prayer is like a telephone for us to talk to Jesus. Pick it up everyday and use it.

Not one of my favourite songs, but its tune was easy and the words were useful for explaining something about the mystery of prayer.

Strange it should come back into my mind during these odd times where visiting is restricted.

But then again maybe not that strange

Because over the last few months I have spent a lot of time on the telephone praying with people in difficult circumstances.

It has become an essential tool not just for organising my day but for conducting ministry with you all.

Prayer is like a telephone

It's a way of communicating with God about how you are feeling.

But we've done that ever since we knew about God.

We've collaborated to tell God how we are feeling, maybe not with a telephone, but with written words. Paul's letters are full of prayers to God.

Charles read for us the great hymn from Philippians 2 this morning where he explains how God, Jesus and us all fit into this communication plan God has.

It contains what is probably the earliest statement of faith the church used. Jesus is Lord

Or in some versions Jesus is the risen Lord.

Rachel ended her talk this morning by reminding us that Paul kept in touch with his churches through letters. His letters were full of concern and practical help as well as teaching about Jesus.

One church was the church in Philippi which was an important Roman colony city on the main East West road across Northern Greece.

It wasn't a port city. The port was at Neapolis, 10 miles away. This city had quite a history and was thoroughly Romanised but with a strong Greek cultural slant. You wouldn't really have expected a large Jewish presence in Philippi and Paul didn't find one.

During his time in Philippi Paul and his companions actually meet a lot of hostility, but still established a church and Paul seems to maintain a very good relationship with this church judging by the letter he wrote.

AS you read Acts and his letter you can get an idea of the hostility Paul faced in this Roma Greek cultural environment.

It's very similar to the hostility that Paul has encountered himself.

So near the start of the letter Paul offers advice And it's advice that is as relevant to us to day as it was in Paul's day.

Be of the same mind make my joy complete by taking encouragement from Jesus Christ. Jesus is the risen Lord.

The danger that threatens the Philippian church has a very modern feel.

It is about people who find themselves living with others who think differently. In one way differences mean a group that is very committed to thinking things through.

But the more enthusiastic they get about their own view , the greater the danger of splits and conflict.

Paul calls the church in Philippi to be of one mind. That word mind means outlook or perspective. He is urging them to work out an agreement.

To think things through we might say

To make room for differences to be respected in one group.

The church of Scotland was actually set up to see things that way.

Everyone has liberty of opinion on matters that do not enter into the substance of the faith as it says in the fifth article declaratory of the church of Scotland.

What Paul is urging us all to think things through under the authoritative guide of Jesus Christ.

This is the perspective he says that brings people together and this is the perspective that stops people expecting perfection from all in the church. Face the truth he says about the world, ourselves and the church.

Some see it as unfortunate that the Bible and the early church are full of disagreement. Suggesting that disagreement prevents the effective spreading of the word and our ability to help our neighbours.

But then again the struggles the church had and Paul was involved in show that God uses normal thinking people like our selves to build his church.

Look at the not so perfect church in Philippi and see how it has the church over many centuries.

We continue to send help to those who are in need of help just like the church at Philippi sent help to those in need in Jerusalem.

This letter to Philippi prevents us idealising the early church and encourages us to consider and build new ways of doing things.

But to do this we rely on God's real presence with us through Jesus.

His grace and his limitless love to support us as we plot our way to a church shaped for today and the future.

Paul urges us to embrace thinking built on all we know and experience of Jesus Christ.

And then in his letter to the church at Philippi, we hear that marvellous faith poem, Charles read for us.

It's the earliest creed of the church.

At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord.

And then Paul reminds us that it is God who is at work within us. God is at work in us making Jesus real to us and our job each day is to spell out all that means to those we meet in our daily lives.

Let us pray

Gracious god

Our prayer is a two fold simple one.

Thank you for the complete story of all that you have done for us through your son Jesus' journey from his birth in a stable to his emptying of the tomb.

And help us too to decide how we can let more people know of this story that underpins our whole lives
For eternity.

Spreading the Good news we call it.

And now to God the Father,

God the Son

And God the Holy Spirit

Be glory and honour

As it was in the beginning

Is now and ever shall be.

WORLD WITHOUT END.

Amen