

Philippians 4:1-9 (NRSV, adapted) - Therefore, my friends, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the way of Christ, my beloved!

I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in Christ. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women for they have struggled beside me with the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my coworkers, whose names are in the book of life.

Rejoice in Christ always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. Christ is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

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. 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.

Matthew 16:13-19 (NRSV) - Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you find on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Upon This Foundation

Well, I am glad it is not just me! I have been reading a lot this week about the short memory of most human beings, and I am glad I am not the only one plagued with an increasingly short memory. It seems that unless we have experienced an event within our own lifetime, our recollection of the details related to that event tend to fade. Those memories, or time markers, become more elusive with each succeeding generation. For instance, I do not remember as much detail about World War II (yes, it was before my time!), and my mother does not remember much detail about World War I, in which my grandfather fought before my mother was born. My children remember very little of what they learned about the Watergate Scandal and the advent of color television; and someday, their children may know little about this season of hurricanes, earthquakes, fires, and mass shootings that we are living through right now.

It is decidedly easier to list three things that happened within our own lifetime that may have changed the course of history, than it is to think of events that happened 300 years ago that shaped society, politics, culture, or the environment with lasting effects. It

gives me pause to wonder what people who will live 300 years from now will learn, and be able to remember about the events of the early 21st century. It is hard for us to imagine, but for those who live three centuries in the future, 9-11 and the bombing of the Federal Building in Oklahoma City may be barely a blip on the proverbial radar screen of their minds.

So, what is worthwhile? What is enduring among the human family? How will we influence people in a way that will change the world, including future generations, for the good?

"Give them Jesus," as Mother Theresa would so often say. "Just give them Jesus!" With the many events of human history that have faded over time, isn't it amazing (or we might say "divine") that we remember in such detail the life, teachings, and writings about **Jesus!**?! He walked on this earth some 2000 years ago, and yet so many people continue to gather on a regular basis for worship, learning, and inspiration all based on the teachings, the death and LIFE of Jesus! I can quote verses and even chapters of scripture about Jesus, even when I cannot remember the lines of a movie I watched yesterday! What is the difference? It is what we do for the God of our creation, salvation, and redemption that will have a lasting influence on the world. It is the Jesus-inspired living that will stand the test of time and failing human memory.

How was that accomplished in such an eternal way? After Jesus had trained-up a band of followers, and while he was still demonstrating the full extent of God's love for creation, Jesus named the world-changing movement. He literally renamed Simon Peter and declared that he would be an integral part of an enduring foundation for the fellowship of believers that would follow for generations to come. Jesus said, "***And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.***"

When I think of a part of **creation** that has the best chance of enduring the test of time, I think of rocks! The rocks of this earth are often billions of years old. Oh, we may move them around, or split them, or cut them, or even try to blow them up, but for the most part, they endure despite storm, adversity, or attack. Jesus was instituting the church of his followers that would also endure forever!

Today, at the conclusion of the worship service you will be given two items which we pray will enhance your relationship with Christ and the church. **First you will be given a rock.** Jesus Christ continues to build the church on the solid rock of a growing faith practice. The rocks/stones you receive will remind you that Christ intends to use your faith, no matter how mighty or frail it may seem, to build up the fellowship of believers, and to spread the gospel throughout the world. **Second, you will be given a devotional booklet** containing a couple of weeks' worth of devotionals written by folks within and with a special connection to this congregation. My request is that you use the rock and the devotionals together daily as reminder and inspiration. You are the rocks of Jesus' church today. And in order to continue to grow in your faith and faithful practice you will need to receive inspiration and encouragement to enhance your witness so that your influence on behalf of Christ will endure.

What will people still be remembering about Kenmore United Methodist Church 300 years from now. They will remember the foundation of faith created by this congregation and how it offered grace, nurture, challenge, and mission opportunities which shaped faith in families for generations!

We are also still considering the timeless charges that Paul gave to the earliest Christian churches. He reminds them that with the faith of Christ as our rock and foundation, we have the peace of Christ that transcends every cycle of human conflict. Leonard Sweet writes that *"Paul's worldview of what really lasts was bound up in his understanding of the cross and resurrection. The death and resurrection of Christ was the linchpin of history, ushering in a new age and anticipating the age to come. He understands that human history has an end point, but God's kingdom does not."* What really lasts, says Paul, are the ideas and actions that mirror Christ ~ whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable... So, upon us, as rocks, Jesus continues to build the church, and to build upon the firm foundation of ministries that offer Christ to the world in ways that have a profound, positive, enduring impact. Like a rock dropped into a pool of water, the ripples of influence will continue to radiate outward as far as the eye can see.

Philippians 4 by Leslie Brandt in *Living Through Loving*

It is my fondest wish that God's children be happy.
I don't mean ecstatic or continually exuberant; I mean happy, full of joy,
that deep-down contentment that persists
even in the midst of trials and tribulations and difficult circumstances. ...

Whatever our real needs,
we know that God will fulfill them in God's own time
and in accordance with God's will.

We can well afford to celebrate, to live in thankfulness,
and to allow the incomprehensible peace of God
to mend the frayed edges of our troubled lives
and make us serene and secure in our Christian faith. ...

Whether we are rich or poor, in the valley or on the mount,
whether there be sorrow or pain or conflict or defeat,
this need not threaten our relationship with God.

We belong to God, and if we think and act as if we belong to God,
nothing will alter that glorious relationship.

We are God's forever, and we can celebrate forever
our adoption and our identity as members of God's family.

And God will provide us with the strength and the courage
that we need to confront and overcome anything that comes our way.

Jesus, looking at a fisherman-turned-disciple, said, "Peter, upon this rock I will build my church." Our Savior chose an ordinary man with an extraordinary anointing of Spirit-power, and set the first stone of the foundation for a church that has thrived for nearly 2000 years. Now it is our turn. We are now the rocks, together forming the church,

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upon which Christ would continue to build. For the church to know its most powerful witness, we each must do our part. We all must combine our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness in ways that multiply the love and compassion of Christ throughout the world. That is at the heart of stewardship! As disciples of Christ we are annually asked to make a commitment to supporting the ministries of the church of Jesus Christ. For each gift equips the church for ministries for generations to come. You are being asked today to begin seeking God's guidance as you prepare to make that commitment for the coming year. Each gift given in Christ's name will have a ripple effect of influence for Christ in our world today, and into the future. We are each invited to do our part to support the ministries of the church and the future that God has in store for us, and for generations to come.

And may the peace of Christ which passes all understanding fill your hearts and minds with such joy in believing, that you give glory to God: Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. Amen.