

Philippians 1.3-11

“The Dance Isn’t Over Yet”

July 6, 2025 – Southridge Community Church

Introduction to the Scripture:

Last week Pastor Jeff concluded our journey through the book of Acts of the Apostles. We read these words, “Paul lived there two whole years at his own expense and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.” Pastor Jeff suggested that this anticlimactic conclusion to the book of Acts was an invitation to each of us to write ourselves into the story. Jeff called us to follow the example of Paul, who was following in the footsteps of Jesus, and proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the ends of the earth from the place we find ourselves in.

One of the ways that Paul lived out his ministry from his prison in Rome was through the writing of letters to the communities of

faith that he had founded or had some role in supporting. We have many of those letters to this day in our sacred text. Today, I want to look at the opening verses of one of those letters. The letter to the Philippians. It will give us some insight into how we can follow the example of Paul, in following in the footsteps of Jesus, as we proclaim the kingdom of God to the ends of the earth from this place and from this moment of our lives.

As I read this passage, I invite us to listen carefully and see if we can discern some characteristics or movements of the spiritual life as people of faith and followers of Jesus.

Scripture Reading: Philippians 1.3-11

³ I thank my God every time I remember you, ⁴ constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, ⁵ because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷ It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart,^[a] for all of you share in God's grace^[b] with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸ For God is my witness, how I long for all of

you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. ⁹ And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight ¹⁰ to help you to determine what is best, so that on the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, ¹¹ having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

This is the word of God, for the people of God, thanks be to God.

Let us pray...

“I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.”

Philippians 1.6

I invite us to take a moment and let that verse speak its wisdom to us. May it flow over us, in us, and through us.

It has been 38 years since I last shared God’s word in this space. It was 1987 and I was a summer intern. I turned 26 that summer. A lifetime has occurred since then. The journey of my life has taken me in many different directions. It has been an incredible adventure.

Last summer I decided to move back to this area. I grew up in Beamsville. I left in 1980 to go to university, and I have not lived here since other than the 3 months that I served as a summer intern pastor. I joked with people that I could return to my hometown because my family was all gone and so it was safe to go back. That actually hasn't been true. I feel like returning home has been an invitation to wrestle with some of the unresolved baggage that I left behind all those years ago.

Last July, I reached out to an old friend from high school. We had spent a lot of time as teenagers doing church. We were church geeks. I asked him where he was going to church. He told me. It was Southridge. I was surprised. I confessed that I didn't think that would be a good place for me. I had some unfinished business with that church, and I didn't think I was ready to deal with it.

I was intrigued, and so I came. I suppose almost like a moth is drawn to a flame. On that first Sunday I felt the presence of God and

I have been here ever since. In some ways this community of faith has helped me navigate a time of transition in my life that feels like God is completing something that God started in me a long time ago.

This morning, as we wonder about God completing the work that God has started in us, I want us to consider the life of faith as a dance. God invites us to dance with God, with each other, with creation and with the world around us.

The passage we heard read for us today is one of my favourite passages in all of our sacred text. And you would be right if you said to me at this moment that the passage says absolutely nothing about dancing. However, as I read these words, I see in them some glimpses of what a dance might look like for us as people of faith and followers of Jesus. Rest assured it is a dance that all of us can dance no matter how limber we are, or not, or how rhythmic we are, or not.

I love to dance, but I have no sense of rhythm, and I am a bit clumsy - awkward. My friend Marlene, a beautiful person of colour from Jamaica, who has an incredible sense of rhythm who moves with grace and sensuality, often just shakes her head in dismay as she watches my pretty awful attempts to move to the beat of the music. She has even given up trying to teach me how to clap properly.

Let me suggest that our passage today offers us at least four different moves in our dance of faith and it will remind us that our dance of faith isn't over yet. The four movements of the dance of faith that I see in this passage are, joy, prayer, love and confidence. No matter where we find ourselves on the journey of our lives, all of us, every one of us, can move in those ways. We all can dance with joy, with prayer, with love and with confidence. Let us take a moment to look at each of those movements of the dance of faith and commit ourselves to moving in these ways.

The first movement in this dance of faith that our passage alludes to is the movement of joy. Our passage begins with Paul saying, “I thank God every time I remember you... with joy... because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now.” According to Acts chapter 16, Paul along with Timothy, Silas and others had founded this community of faith in the Roman City of Philippi. He had a strong bond with them, and he was thankful for the dance that they had shared. As he remembers their dance he is filled with joy.

It is all about joy for Paul. This is astonishing because Paul as he writes this letter is in prison. In chapter 4, he concludes, “rejoice in the Lord always, again I will rejoice.” A little bit later in the same chapter Paul says, “I rejoice in the Lord greatly.” The dance of faith for Paul is all about joy.

Likewise, joy is found throughout our sacred story. Nehemiah encourages the people of Israel as they are beginning to rebuild their temple after it had been destroyed by the Babylonians with these

words found in Nehemiah 8.10, “and do not be grieved for the joy of the Lord is our strength.” The psalmist puts it this way in Psalm 51.12, “restore to me the joy of my salvation.” The life of faith is a dance of joy.

In my work life I support communities of faith who are in times of transition. I have been known to say to some of those churches that if their service to each other and to their community is not bringing them any joy then it is time for them to close up shop. Joy is a sign that God is with us. Wherever joy is found our God is present. As people of faith and followers of Jesus can we join Paul and the Philippians in remembering each other with joy as we share the gospel with our world? Can we let the joy of the Lord renew us and move us forward, because the dance isn't over yet. Let's keep dancing.

The second movement of this dance of faith according to our passage is prayer. In verse 4, Paul says that he is “constantly

praying” for all of them. In verse 9, Paul says, “And this is my prayer,” and goes on to share with them what he is praying for. Paul begins many of his letters in the same way. Paul, like Jesus, bathes his ministry and service to the various communities of faith in prayer. Paul puts it this way in Romans 1.9, “For God, whom I serve with my spirit by announcing the gospel of his Son, is my witness that without ceasing I remember you always in my prayers.” Renewal begins with prayer. Can we commit ourselves as a community of faith to praying for each other and the world because the dance isn’t over yet. Let’s keep dancing.

The dance of faith is a dance of joy and a dance of prayer.

The third movement of this dance is love. Paul says in verse 9, “And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to determine what is best.” Love will give us the wisdom we need to make the next right step. If we are

struggling with what to do next, it is always good to begin by asking ourselves, who is God calling us to love.

This passage describes an intimate relationship between Paul and the Philippian church. He describes them as “holding him in their hearts.” He goes on to say that he “longs for them with the compassion of Jesus.” In Matthew 14.14 we get a glimpse of the compassion of Jesus which motivated Paul, “When Jesus went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion for them and cured their sick.” Jesus’ love and Paul’s love and our love must be real and tangible and not just empty words.

The word compassion comes from the same Greek root as the word, “bowels or guts” which reminds us that the love of Jesus came from deep within. This is the kind of love that Paul had for the Philippians and the kind of love they had for him. Can we commit ourselves to loving others in the same way from the bottom of our

heart and the centre of our being? Because you see folks, the dance of faith isn't over yet. Let's keep dancing.

The dance of faith is a dance of joy, a dance of prayer and a dance of love.

Finally, the dance of faith is a dance of confidence. Paul says to the Philippians, "I am confident of this, that the One who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by day of Jesus Christ." This verse has followed me most of my life. Sometimes it has mocked me because I have not always been able to see how God was at work in my life. There have been days when I have wondered where God was. There were days when I could not dance the dance of faith with any confidence.

There have also been other moments in my journey of faith that I realized that the dance was not about me. Look at the verse closely. It is not about us. It is about our God. Our confidence does not rest in our ability, or our creativity, or our hard work. Our

confidence is grounded in a God who promises to walk with us every step of the way. Our confidence is grounded in a God who is committed to finishing what God has started in each of us as individuals and as communities of faith. That completion may not happen in our lifetime. God will complete all things on the Day of Jesus Christ. We have no idea when that day will be, but that is not for us to worry about. Our job is simply to trust that it is God who is faithfully at work in us and through us. The dance isn't over yet. Let's keep dancing!

When did God begin that work in us? The psalmist in Psalm 139.15-16 says this, "My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them existed." God has been at work in you and me long before we even began our journey. God has been at work in us even before we were

“fearfully and wonderfully made” and “knitted together in our mother’s womb.” This is our confidence. Our confidence is in God. Who looks at us through loving eyes and says, “you are beautiful, you are loved, and I will complete what I have started in you and through you.” Keep on dancing for the dance isn’t over yet.

Our passage today invites to see the life of faith as a dance. A dance of joy, a dance of prayer, a dance of love and a dance of confidence. I recently celebrated my 64th birthday. I hope that I still have a lot more dance in me, but who knows for sure. The advantage though of turning 64 is that I can look back and see how “yes” there were some very dark days and yet I can also say that “yes” God has been at work in me and through me bringing to completion what God started. Now I may never finish everything that God had in mind for me to do when God knit me together in my mother’s womb, and I certainly won’t be able to make myself pure and blameless on the day of Christ that only Jesus can do through

his death and resurrection. Paul reminds us that it is not about me or about you. It is about a God who invites us into God's arms and let God's love enfold us and lead us in a dance towards wholeness. The dance isn't over yet. Will we accept God's invitation to dance? Let's keep dancing! **Amen.**