Philippians 1:3-11
Prayer Full of Joy (1 of 3)
WRCoB 5.18.25

Three score and ten years ago
As the old phrase goes
This particular Hoosier was birthed by my mother
Virginia Bittinger Whitten, in Huntington, Indiana

This was when Dad was serving as pastor
Of the Markle Church of the Brethren.

Today, my chronological age is 70
Though I feel my subjective age is closer to 35!

I just don't feel that old!

And I am truly grateful to God
For blessing me with good health.

My age and my looming retirement
Has caused me to reflect a little
Concerning the last score (20 years) of my life.

In conversation with a friend I asked the question:

If you had the choice, between a sharp mind in a failing body
Or a sharp body with a failing mind?

Which would you choose?

We both decided memories are just too important to lose
That if given a choice
We'd rather have the sharp mind.

And maybe that's why the Apostle Paul
Begins his deeply personal letter to the Philippians
Focusing on the joy of memory, as he writes
'I thank my God every time I remember you.'

As I wind up seven years of ministry with you
I am also filled with good memories.

So, with a slightly fading 70-year-old mind
And with a heart filled with gratitude

I resonate in much the same way
As Paul did back in his day

Nothing but gratitude

Actually, what makes Paul's letter to the Philippians
Even more remarkable is where he writing from.

He's not on the beach, sipping Margaritas
Watching the sun set over the Mediterranean

He's in custody in Rome, likely under house arrest
Facing an uncertain future.

Though Paul is incarcerated
And could have easily complained about his fate
Focusing on his own troubling situation

He does exactly the opposite
He writes a letter of appreciation and gratitude.

He is filled with joy.

I thank my God every time I remember you (1:3)

There he is, looking out beyond his own captivity
Thinking about one of the newer congregations.

It was a new church start in the Roman colony of Philippi
In the province of Macedonia.

And every time he thinks of them
Which seems to be quite often.
His good memories move him to joyful prayer.

In all of my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy (1:4).

His gratitude moves him to pray to God filled with joy.

Why is Paul so moved with gratitude and joy?

He tells us in verse 5:

because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now (1:5).

This word 'partnership' is so key here;
It's the Greek word

koinōnia

It means having a rich and deep fellowship or community
Filled with the Spirit of unity in the body of Christ.

Obviously, Paul has a good feeling about this congregation.

So good, in fact, that

He is **confident of this, that [God] who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (1:6).**

His ultimate confidence
Isn't just in the Philippians themselves
As wonderful as they are.

His confidence is in God.
As he says,

He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion (1:6).

Paul knew that their faith, their efforts
Their sense of community
Their common bonds of love
All stems from God's love

And because it was God who began it
Paul knew God would see it through.

Let that provoke our own thoughts just a little.
~~
There is this spiritual current in these first verses.

Paul's remembering flows into thanksgiving
Which drifts toward joy
And cascades into joyful prayer.

His joy is rooted in their togetherness
And Paul is certain God is guiding them
Towards a grand and glorious future.
~~

And it's in that same spirit
That same 'spiritual current' we find in Paul's writing

This remembering, this thanksgiving
The joyful prayers, and confidence in God

That I feel stirring in my own heart and mind.

And being another year older
And preparing to retire from full-time ministry

Causes me to reflect feelings of deep gratitude
As I remember all of you.

I'm sure you were all a bit skeptical the first time we met.

My beautiful African wife and lovely daughter
And me stomping around in my cowboy boots
Parking my Farmall Cub in your shed

You probably wondered what you got yourself into
When you called me as your pastor

Seven years later, you might still be wondering.
~~
My own memories are of a bitter/sweet kind.

Walking alongside those who reached the end of life
Together with their families and friends

Discerning how best to move forward
When the pandemic struck and stuck around.

The countless deep conversations we had
In our book studies on racism

The many discussions in Sunday school and Bible study

All the mutual projects we joined in on
From Trunk-or-Treat to Liberation Veterans' Services

The celebration of West Richmond's 100th Anniversary

From the weekly mowing
To the cutting up of fallen trees

All that entails being involved together in community.

All the worship services we have shared together

The wonderful congregational singing
The music our Minister of Music prepares for us

The special music I have been privileged to participate in

Our earnest praying
Our continuing discovery of God and God's will
In our Bible reading

The tears and the laughter
It is all there
All a part of life in community.

All the deep connections we have made over the years.

It is not easy to let it go.

And I will miss it.

But as Paul says in 2 Timothy

2 Timothy 4:7 NLT
I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful.

I may have overlooked or neglected someone
Or something in the needs of the congregation

I may have offended you or insulted you.

And if I have upset or slighted you in anyway
I ask that you forgive me.

I have tried to be honest, straightforward, sincere
And as human as I could be.

I did not come as a pastor who thought he knew everything.

I used Google just as much or more than you did!

But my sincere hope through it all
Is that our journey together
Brought us closer to God
And closer to one another.

I have tried to engage our extended community
Through my participation in Clergy Against Racism
Henrico Ministers Conference and Vicinity
And volunteering in HCPS.

There continues to be much work to do.

And it will be through the grace and strength of God
That we will continue to participate together w/God
In building God's kingdom on earth
As it is in heaven.

Over the next two weeks
We'll look to the remaining verses found in this passage
For insight and vision into what God has for us all.

And as I pray for you
It will always be a joyful prayer.

And as I pray for you
I ask that you would pray also for me.

I remember one of the first Sundays I was here
Someone came through the line and told me

That I am following in the footsteps
Of many great pastors and leaders.

I know that, truly.

They were smarter, wiser, and more gifted than me.

I only hope, in my own way
I have been a pastor to you in these 7 years.

It is a time for discernment and reflection
For both you and me.

Let's make sure we include God in the process.

For God alone can show us the way.

For in my prayers to God I will always think of you.