

Philippians 1:12-18

Our text for today comes from the Apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians. The Philippians were a very **special** group of people, and Paul had a very special **relationship** with them. Think about some of the **people** who were a part of that congregation. There was **Lydia**, a seller of purple cloth - a woman who had considerable earthly **wealth** - a woman who started out worshiping God by the river, and who used her wealth to help **Advance The Gospel** through the work of Paul. Then there was also the un-named **jailor** of Philippi - a man who had almost tragically taken his own life - but who instead was so impressed by the faith of Paul and Silas, that he ended up **Advancing The Gospel** - seeking a faith like theirs for **himself**, as well as for the members of his **family**. These people, and others like them in Philippi, had become like a **family** to the Apostle Paul, and families need to stay in touch.

For that reason, the Philippians sent Epaphroditus to **Rome**, when they learned that the Apostle Paul had been **imprisoned** there. Like all good Lutherans they wondered, "What does this mean?" What does it mean for **Paul** himself, and what does it mean for the **Gospel** of Jesus Christ? Right off the bat, as he begins his letter to them, Paul strives to answer their **questions**, and calm their **fears**. He explains that **all** the things which are happening - whether they seem to be good or **bad** - are things which are **Advancing The Gospel**. In reality, why would it be any other way? God always has a **plan**, and as Paul had already written to the believers in **Rome**, "*In all things God works for the good of those who love Him.*"

Nevertheless, it isn't strange at all that the Philippians would want some **information** on what was happening. After all, Paul was in **jail**. How would **that** look to the prospective **followers** of his message? When the chief proponent of a project is in **prison**, that doesn't really send a positive message, does it? Think of someone like Bernie Madoff! How many of you would be willing to buy into his next investment prospectus?

But Paul wanted the Philippians to know that even though it **seemed bad** that he was in prison, **God** had seen to it that **good things** were coming out of it. First of all, his imprisonment wasn't **severe** or **limiting**. Actually, it was more like a **house arrest** than it was an imprisonment. Paul was able to live in his own rented **apartment**, he was able to speak **freely** with anyone who came to visit him, and he could pretty much carry on a **normal** schedule throughout the day.

However, he **did** need to be **chained** to a Roman **guard** 24 hours a day.

Even **that** turned out to be a **positive** for Paul. Let me tell you a little bit about the **process** used for guarding a prisoner like Paul. The prisoner was literally **never** alone. Guards were assigned to have their wrist chained to his wrist for 6 hours at a time. That means there were 4 guards taking care of Paul in a 24 hour period. Since these guards were all **Romans**, many (if not all of them) were also **heathen**. That gave Paul 24 hour a day **access** to people who were **lost**, and the **best** part was that they couldn't **run away**. Although **Paul** was the one who was in **chains**, **they** were the ones who were the **captive audience**.

I'm sure it didn't take these soldiers very long to start asking Paul about **why** he was a prisoner. "What are you **in** for?" is a pretty common question for prisoners. And I'm sure it didn't take **Paul** very long to tell them that he was in chains for **Christ**. Over the course of the next 2 years or so, literally **thousands** of soldiers could have had the opportunity to learn about their **Savior** from sin, while they were **chained** to Paul. Then they in turn told their **families**, and **friends**, and **neighbors**, and before long **everybody** was talking about **Christ**. Paul wrote in verse 13, "*As a result, it has become clear throughout the **whole palace guard** and to **everyone else** that I am in chains for **Christ**.*" So obviously, although **Paul** was imprisoned in chains, **God's Word** was **not** in chains or limited in any way.

So often, that's the way God chooses to **Advance The Gospel** - through something that **seems** to be **negative** - through **chains**. Think about those people **today** who, like the Apostle Paul, are **chained** by the legal system - behind the bars of a jail or prison. Many times they didn't know Jesus **before** they got to prison, and they actually **learned** about Him there. Some **former** prisoners have also developed **prison ministries**, in which they go **back** to prison again, in order to share the message of the **Savior** with others. Or think about those people who feel **chained** to a physical **disability**. While their disability **limits** their access to many things, at the same time it **gives** them access to people with whom they otherwise wouldn't have had any contact. It provides **opportunities** to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with other people who have the **same** disability.

And then there are those **parents** who sometimes feel chained to their **children** - especially when they are very **young**. It's true, children **change** your life, and in many ways they **take away** your freedom. Things which used to be so **simple** when you were single, become a major **project** when you have **children**.

You can't go **anywhere** or do **anything** without taking along the baby, and the car seat, and the diaper bag, and the stroller, and the list of necessary items seems to keep getting longer every year. Yet, these **children** are also opportunities to **Advance The Gospel**. Martin Luther wrote in The Estate of Marriage, "*The greatest good in married life, that which makes all suffering and labor worth while, is that God grants **offspring** and commands that they be brought up to **worship** and **serve** Him. In all the world this is the **noblest** and most **precious** work, because to God there can be nothing dearer than the **salvation** of souls. God has entrusted to its bosom **souls** begotten of its own body, on whom it can lavish all manner of **Christian** works. Most certainly **father** and **mother** are apostles, bishops, and priests to their **children**, for it is **they** who make them acquainted with the **Gospel**. In short, there is no **greater** or **nobler** authority on earth than that of parents over their children, for this authority is both **spiritual** and **temporal**. Whoever teaches the **Gospel** to another is truly his apostle and bishop.*" Simply stated, God gives **children** to parents, so they can teach them God's plan of salvation, and **Advance The Gospel**.

The **other** benefit of Paul's imprisonment can be found in the ministry of **others**. Paul wrote, "*Because of **my chains**, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God **more courageously** and **fearlessly**.*" The point is that when **Paul** wasn't able to do the preaching **himself**, **others** stepped up to fill in the gap. That same thing happened right here at First German too. When Pastor Hahm took his call to Louisiana, that cut our **pastoral** staff in **half**. But, **lay people** quickly stepped up to carry out ministry - teaching Bible classes, leading the Youth Group, and visiting the sick in hospitals. The neat thing is that these ministries are **still going on**, even after the arrival of Pastor Schaefer. That means that now we have **more** people doing **more** ministry; and as a result, the **Advance Of The Gospel** is being carried out more **broadly** and more **effectively** among us.

Now, Paul does go on to tell us that not **all** of the brothers in Rome were carrying out **their** ministries with the right **motives**. But he **also** tells us that he didn't **care**. Paul wrote, "*It is **true** that some preach Christ out of **envy** and **rivalry**, but **others** out of **goodwill** ... But what does it **matter**? The important thing is that in every way, whether from **false** motives or **true**, **Christ is preached**. And because of this I **rejoice**.*" Certainly Paul wasn't saying that the **end** justifies the **means** - that it's OK to do something for the **wrong** reason, just as long as it gets **done**. But rather, Paul was saying that he didn't care if **his** reputation was

decreased, as long as **Christ's** reputation was **increased**. **Advancing The Gospel** was **foremost** in Paul's heart and mind, and everything else fell into a **lower** priority.

Is that the way it is for **us** too? Is the Good News of Jesus Christ our **highest** priority? Are we willing to **sacrifice everything** for the sake of **Advancing The Gospel**? Or do we let our **personal** wants and **selfish** motives get in the **way**? Take a good look at your life. Where do you spend most of your **time** - serving the **LORD**, or serving **yourself**? Where do you use most of your **talents** - serving the **LORD**, or serving **yourself**? Where do you spend most of your **money** - serving the **LORD**, or serving **yourself**? As we walk through our appointment calendars and peruse our checkbook entries, we may well find that we need to do some **repenting**, and some **redirecting**. May the LORD give us the **honesty** and the **strength** we need to do **whatever** it takes, so that the work which Jesus accomplished to earn the forgiveness of our sins **becomes** or **remains** the highest priority in our lives. And then may we continue to **share** that message of full and free **forgiveness** with those who are **in chains** - those who are **enslaved** by sin. Amen.