

Fifth Sunday in Lent  
Sermon Text: Philippians 3:4b-14  
Related text: John 12:1-8  
Date Preached: March 21, 2010

Heavenly Father, lead us in lives of faithful living that we may press on in the midst of difficulty to the goal of the resurrection to new life we have through your Son Jesus our Lord. AMEN.

Persistence. Persevere. Keep moving. Don't give up now. It may be hard, but you can do it.

That is the pep talk that Paul is offering to the church in Philippi. This is a church that supported Paul in his ministry with wonderful gifts. Paul is expressing his thanks to this congregation for their ministry and for sharing their gifts to make known the good news of Jesus Christ.

Such support is crucial on many levels. It deepens the partnership that Paul has with the church in Philippi and with the other churches with whom he ministers. Through these gifts the poor were being uplifted, hungry people were fed, widows were cared for and most importantly, the good news of Jesus Christ was proclaimed.

We ourselves are no strangers to such work. As one congregation among the Churches of Christians

Uniting, we are meeting the needs of the hungry through meals on wheels. We are providing an important ministry together through St. Afterschool which is benefiting children in our community in ways that have far reaching impacts. For one afternoon each week, those children who come to do homework, eat together and do crafts are also learning that there are caring people who are truly interested in them. In the volunteers who serve they are seeing the love of God.

Jumping back to our reading from Philippians, it is important to remember that the needs of the church in Philippi are not being ignored. Their ministry continues.

Yet there will be great challenges. In the midst of this letter of thanks comes a word of encouragement from Paul, because things will not always be easy. Times will be difficult for people of faith. We may be hurtfully labeled because of the stands we take based on our faith. We may look see an aspect of our ministry that is not producing the results we have hoped.

The goal may seem too far to reach when we feel alone in our beliefs. How then can we move forward

in a life of faith when we hit these walls? How might we press on when doubts creep in to our thinking?

We can move forward because Christ Jesus has already made you his own. In Holy Baptism God claimed you as one of His children. It was for us and for our salvation that Jesus traveled the road of the cross.

Remember the journey of our Lord. We have heard in scripture that Jesus was tempted. We have heard people doubt him. And we are at a point in our scripture reading where the finish line is within sight.

Mary is making the final preparations for Jesus last leg of the journey. She is anointing the feet of our Lord. She is doing this with the best of oils, the very finest of her efforts going so far as to use her own hair as a towel.

She will not be deterred. Jesus will not allow Judas' selfishness to deter him or Mary from doing what is needed. It is time to head into Jerusalem. It is time to fulfill what he was sent to do.

It is a lonely road. It is a road filled with false accusations. It is a journey of betrayal. It is a journey that only Jesus can take because his disciples

are too afraid; and while we think that we wouldn't abandon him, there is no guarantee that we would act any differently.

For it is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that we can press onto toward the goal that Christ has made attainable through his death and resurrection. With the help of the Holy Spirit we can look ahead to the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

We have received this gift. The promise of salvation is ours, not by our own merit but through Jesus. And with that peace of mind and heart, we press on in ministry to share this good news. This gift becomes our own, not to individually hoard but to generously share, following the example of the generosity of Mary.

While the journey is not always easy, it is a journey in which we never travel alone. We travel in the presence of the Holy Spirit, fed by the Word of God, and empowered to press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call. In this journey, let us encourage one another in this walk of faith to the new life to come. AMEN.