Pastor Mike Wicks

Philippians 2:12-16

**Communion**

**February 7, 2020**

“Unlocking the Future!”

***What are the keys to our future?*** We all *have reasonable uncertainty* when trying to psych it out. Have you noticed the focus of our uncertainty changes with age? Early in life it seems as if *formal schooling* is forever. I for one thought sixth grade would never end. We graduated to wondering what *our life purpose* might be or perhaps *who* we might share life with. *Work years* bring their own uncertainties and rewards and *retirement* seems to raise as many questions as it answers. We go through an entire life cycle **focusing on developmental tasks -** and rarely are we confident about the future.

Our text for today is, in essence, a love letter. Paul writes to people he loves; people who are ***worried sick about the future.*** In the part of the letter we heard today, we are given keys to unlocking the future at whatever place in life we might find ourselves.

The first key Paul offers is that **we are not meant to travel alone**. We should all get T-shirts, *“Life is short, don’t go it alone.”* We might have missed the point because in English the word for *“you”* as an individual and *“you”* meaning all of you in the community of faith is the same. Not so in Greek. Paul prefers the second person plural. The things he tells us in today’s text *are for all of us* as we live life together. Want to have confidence about the future? ***Don’t travel alone***.

The next key for unlocking the future from Paul comes in the form of ***encouraging and positive observations***. *You all have done well. You shine like stars in the night sky.* ***Keep on embodying God’s life, and shine like stars***: (Picture of the shooting stars Night Sky)

Paul is telling the Philippians – and us by extension – that ***when we get this right – when we build on the success of being God’s people in the world – it is a beautiful thing.*** Short on Confidence for the future? *Build on the life of faith you already have.*

The final key we take away today for opening the future is that we *must not give up* because things are not as we wish they were. Instead, there are great dividends when we ***make the most of what we have***. To really appreciate this, we need to address what for me has always felt like the jarring part of this passage. ***“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”*** It is so encouraging that God works in us so *we will want what God wants and do what pleases God* – Yeah! But what about that *“Fear and Trembling” stuff?* Doesn’t that sound like Paul is taking away all the encouragement offered and **replacing it with dread?** God is on your side! But only if you are terrified. Something is deeply wrong with *how we hear this*.

It turns out, the phrase ***“Fear and Trembling”*** is a stock phrase from the Old Testament. And the phrase is used to signal the ***appropriate response to the presence and activity of God*.** The word we might use in this context is ***“awe.”*** Something beyond our ability to describe or understand. The great theologian Karl Barth said we can translate this as ***“startled humility.”*** ***How amazing*** that God has given us the gift of life and relationship with God and each other. We unlock the future not only by making the most of what we have – ***but also by recognizing and being grateful for who we already are.***

***Let’s be startled by God’s goodness*** and joyfully share life together…let’s *build on the life we already have*…shining like stars in the night sky…*completing in our lives what God has already started*. It turns out, we don’t handle the future by either **controlling** it or being **afraid** of it – but by discovering God’s life at work in us – and finding – wonder of wonders, miracle of miracles - it is enough.