

Kings Norton Baptist Church

Sunday 3rd December 2023 10 am

The new Community

Welcome to all.

Opening Scripture and prayer

Hymn MP 33 And can it be that I should gain.

Scripture Isaiah 65:17 - 66:2 (page 753)

Prayer of praise and thanksgiving.

Light 1st Advent candle

Children's talk - Drawing the house, thinking ahead, having a plan, the world, your life.

Chorus MP 14 All heaven declares

Notices Interview David Venema,

December plan, leaflet distribution towards 17th do invite.

Welcome Wakeem into membership

Prayer and share time.

Reading Ephesians 2:18-22 (page 1174)

Philippians 4:20-23 (page 1181)

Hymn MP 755 When I survey the wondrous cross

Sermon: The new Community

Hymn mp 349 It passeth knowledge this dear love of thine

Closing Prayer - the Grace

[Sermon Index Database](#)

“To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.” Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send greetings. All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.” (Php 4:20-23 NIV)

Prayer and Exordium

This morning's sermon is entitled “the new Community” x2

This is the best way to summarise the last four verses of Paul's letter to the Christians at Philippi.

We hear the word ‘Community’ everywhere. It is over-used.

- We have the Sikh community, the Polish community, we have the angler's community, the travelling community, the LGBT community, even the 'homeless' 'community'. A TV series was called 'Community'. But how often there is precious little 'comm-unity' to be evidenced.

The less there is ‘true Community’ the more, it seems, the word is used. The world likes to label, and to organize people. If what unites a group is only their shared interest in bowling or narrow boats, or vegetarian cooking then there will most probably be very little unity in that group when it comes their view on politics, what to do with HS2 or which is the best country to holiday in.

But even when there is a strong shared interest – How likely is it that they will have any love or concern for each another?

The truth is that however hard the world strives towards uniting people – it will fail. It will fail because there is no, has never been, any genuine unity in those who are still in Adam. We are at odds in Adam. Try what may, it won't happen. Yet there is one true community – a people united by Jesus, the Spirit of Jesus who lives within every true believer. It is a unity of the Spirit – not an organization, but an organism - uniting people from within. Like our bodies, every part joined together with the head. So we as the body of Christ are all united to the Head, Jesus, - and therefore to each other.

The church is that new community, born again believers, living by One Spirit.

As we saw last week it is made up of those whom the Lord has called and in whom Christ has done his transforming work. So Paul can pray confidently **May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** Ro 15:5-6

That last phrase is a good place to start because that is what we read here in v20 **“To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”** It sounds like the end doesn't it. Amen!

It is easy to skip over the bits at the beginning of the letter, or the end of a letter, these greetings or salutations. We expect them to be there to be polite, - we could do with more of that, so sadly lacking today, even among Christians.

When you read them you will see that they are not platitudes, they are not buttering the hearer up for the tough rebuff about to be landed on the recipient. Nor are they just pretty bookends. We would do well to give them attention, as we should with every word in Holy Scripture. Don't grieve the Lord by skipping over bits that you think have little value to you. They are there for a reason.

As we look at these last four verses several key words are found.

The new community - is a community of Grace, Grace

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen." Php 4:23 these exact words are spoken also to Philemon in 1:25

As Paul started his letter to the church in Philippi with the words **Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.** Php 1:2 so he ends. Paul invariably starts his letters this way – let us linger over them and ponder their content.

God's people have been made a people because of Grace. We have all received Grace. this underserved favour of God – is from God – to undeserving sinners – paid for by Jesus Christ in his tremendous giving of Himself at Calvary.

Who is a Christian? what is a Christian? I seem to regularly be having this discussion with people. We are those who have received grace from the Lord, received from the Lord the greatest of gifts, Himself. **Christ in you** and me **the sure hope of Glory.** And through the gift of Faith **we are included in Christ** (Eph 1:13)

Paupers can only receive – we have nothing to give. Therefore there is no-one better, or worse than any other before God, for God the fathers sees Christ in all and accepts us on this basis, and this basis alone.

What does this produce? Because all we are - is only what we have received - it is a community characterized by humility.

The more you see your debt to God – the more you see His Grace to you.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Php 1:2

Ac 15:40, and also 1Co 16:23. In fact the last phrase in the Bible says **The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.** Re 22:21

Yes we are people of Grace and that is why we say to each other 'The Grace' as we will at the end: **May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.** 2Co 13:14

So I have to ask you, are you in this new community? Are you 'in'

Do you know? Are you sure? Have you received His Grace? It is for those who have been to the Cross to confess their need for cleansing, have sought him for purification from sin. Have you been there? Have you received it? Can you speak of it?

Or are you doing your best, if you are doing your best, you will never receive anything from Him. Why should you?, the self-righteous receive nothing from God. It is only those who come with an empty bowl who receive. And we do.

⇒ Thomas Chalmers was eager to show that it really mattered how people lived their lives. He stressed that it was only as people were supernaturally freed from the power of sin and Satan by the work of the Holy Spirit that they were then able to live their lives in accordance with the scriptures, in the community of God's people.

The new community - is a community of brothers, & sisters in Christ

Like a family we care for each other. Paul often uses the word 'brothers' **The brothers who are with me send greetings.** v21

We are brothers and sisters in the Lord's spiritual family with God as our father. He is the source of our life **Grace and peace to you from God our Father**

⇒ *Therefore, there should this instant recognition of this unique relationship*
Two Sundays ago we read from Luke's gospel Chapter 8 where Jesus' natural family call for him. To which Jesus says two things: His family are those who hear and obey his word. And secondly, that this spiritual family is more important than our natural family. The eternal family over our temporal family.

⇒ *Let us recognize this. Let us acknowledge this. And love one another.*

Verse 21 says: **Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send greetings. All the saints send you greetings,**

Three times we read here of 'greeting' being sent.

Paul says that one way we show this new relationship is expressed in greeting one another.

▪ I remember with sadness one Christian brother who would come in through the door and walk past you without saying even a 'hello'. It used to hurt. Not only is that rude, but it denies the family bond.

Even amongst unbelievers a greeting is common. Still today outside of the cities you would say 'hello' to those you walk past in the road, and they're

often strangers, how much more should we say 'hello' to, as a minimum, to our brothers and sisters in the Lord. It is important to recognise our relationship.

- We could put the Bible, Hymn book and bulleting neatly piled up on a table with a sign saying 'help yourself'.

The world loves this type of 'efficiency'. But where is the fellowship in that? We want to greet you warmly as you enter. Many then go round and greet others, not to natter and distract them from preparing to come before the Lord, but to acknowledge one another.

Five times Paul says to the churches as the people of God we are to **Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings.** Ro 16:16, and again to the Corinthians 1Co 16:20 **All the brothers here send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss.** Three times more in 2Co 13:12, 1Th 5:26, 1Pe 5:14

In other words there is an affection between the spiritual family – just as there should be in our natural families – of which the church is the true example.

A kiss, and we are reminded a **Holy kiss**, was the cultural norm of the day. In Britain a hearty handshake accompanied with a bright smile, for some a hug, a minimal one is best.

- Yes kissing is the norm in many countries and it is always useful to know whether it is one cheek, two cheeks or back for the a third peck.

Whatever it is let us take greetings seriously. Let us not be off hand, nor just business like, nor 'cordial', nor distant. And certainly not absent altogether.

So too in our new world of messaging here's our chance as Christians to be different to the world around. Letters have structure, emails less so, and text, messaging, or tweets none. For most now it is to get straight to the point, with no greetings at the beginning, nor at the end, communication is just abrupt. It would be ridiculous to say every text in a run of texts should have greetings, I am not say that, but simply that communication is more than just content. As Christians let our conversations, that includes everything, **be full of Grace.** Col 4 Let us never become more and more straight to the point instead of considering that communication is primarily about relationships, that must come first.

But 'community' is not just how we greet each other on the door, or when messaging, it is not just in this room, it is a shared life, lives run in parallel, with each other, and in Jesus.

Fellowship lunch is to help us to know each other better - to live this out.

Did you notice some symmetry in Paul's lines here....

Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send greetings. He goes from the general "greet all" to the specific "the brothers with me"

Again - **All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.** The general 'all the Saints, to the specific - especially or in particular those who belong to Caesar's household.

So while every brother and sister in Christ should be greeted affectionately as we recognise the wider family united by the Spirit of Jesus, there are also those who we know, specifically.

The brothers who are with me Paul had them with him on his journeys, we know who they are because Paul often affectionately mentions his fellow labourers by name. Aristarchus, Mark, Justus, Epaphras, Luke, and Demas. They are prominent members of the churches. See the close of Romans; 1Corinthians; Colossians; and 2 Timothy. Titus and *Philemon*.

⇒ There is reason to believe that the bonds of affection among the churches then were much stronger than they are now.

All the saints send you greetings, that is all there in Rome during his imprisonment. No individuals are specified, although we already know of Epaphroditus, and the epistle bears internal evidence of having been written from Rome and was doubtless sent by Epaphroditus. Remember there was also Onesimus, the run-away slave.

v22 **especially those who belong to Caesar's household.** Yes let us take note of this evidence of divine mercy, the gospel had made its way into the heart of empire and in this case the sink of all crime and debauchery. What a wonderful insight to know that there is holiness ruling - in the courts of rulers. The Lord's people are everywhere. Praise Him for that!

Nero was at this time emperor of Rome: cruel, wicked, violent Nero. It has been said: 'a more worthless and diabolic wretch never disgraced the name or form of man.' Yet in his household there were Christians: but whether this relates to the members of the *imperial family*, or to *guards*, or *courtiers*, or to *servants*, we cannot tell. If even some of his *slaves* were converted to Christianity, it would marvellous. Converts to Christianity in this household there certainly were; how powerfully the Divine word had been preached and spread.

No wonder the next phrase v23 is about grace, **The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

The Church at Philippi was a gospel church. Paul being thrown into prison had resulted in a great turmoil. so Paul had to remind them that the Lord reigns over all things, He is working out His purposes for the good of his people. What good news it must have been to hear of converts in Caesars household. - Yes his imprisonment had turned out for good.

The new community - is a community of Saints

21 **Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus.**

22 **All the saints send you greetings,**

When we say saint we don't me a stained glass saint, or a Roman Catholic version where some acclaimed individual is all but deified and entitled 'Saint so and so' and is assumed to have unique divine favour.

The saint in the bible comes from the word *hagios*, which is more often translated as Holy. We use the word sanctified that is to be made Holy, or set apart for the Lord. So every Christian is a saint. In fact in our Bibles it is never used in the singular 'a saint' but always used in the plural **saints** meaning the group of those made Holy, a Holy community, we are together set apart for the Lord.

⇒ The early church father Justin Martyr noted that his community doesn't consider people true Christians if they simply quote Christ's teachings but don't live them. He believed that the effectiveness of Christian witness depends on the integrity of the believers' lifestyles. The churches baptise only people who live the things that Christ teaches, and allows them to participate in the eucharistic services only if they "live as Christ handed down to us." (page 15 Justin 1 Apol 61:2,66:1 (Hardy 282,286)

20 **"To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen."** Php 4:20

The new community – is of the Lord – and it is for the Lord.

We are for His Glory. Paul glorified the Lord in His life – and in his death.

It is generally considered that he was twice imprisoned at Rome: this being the *first* and that he was released; - but his *second* imprisonment lead to his *martyrdom*.

Every Christian is immortal till his work is done. Paul had finished the work the Lord had for him to do. Let us likewise keep the faith, and like him defend the faith, and like him finished the course; That we too when taken away will be crowned with Glory.

20 **"To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen."** Php 4:20

4a

What a rapturous outburst. All the glory is God's. Let us ascribe glory to God the Father, the glory of his own excellence and of all his mercy to us.

The church at Philippi, the Christians at Philippi had their fair share of problems, both within the church and without. Yet Paul reminds them that for all this that they can rejoice in the Lord, for they are the new community.

So we too are that new community here in Kings Norton, taken out of the world, set apart from the world, and sent into the world to be salt and light to it.

We are together citizens of heaven and eagerly await a Saviour from there.

And yes in the meantime there will be trials, but in these may others see how with the Lord's strength we are helped through them and remain in loving fellowship one with another.

We are the community – bought by Grace, brought into one family of brothers and sisters, together being made Holy in Jesus, and for the Lord and His Glory. The church now is in two places – here on earth and in Heaven, gradually we are all moving to be united together in perfect unity in God's new world.

May we as the Lord's people here be so centered on the Lord and obedient to His word that **"if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!""** 1Co 14:24-25

END

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