

Easter 4: Farewell from me

15 May 2022

High Street Uniting Church Frankston

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(Upon the conclusion of my placement in Frankston)

Read: **John 13: 31-35; Philippians 4:2-9**

Faithful God, guide us by your word and Holy Spirit, so that at all times and in all places we may know your love and serve you with joy, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Today is a bit of a day for looking backwards and looking forwards. It's definitely a bittersweet day for me, as I'm sad about departing as much as I also appreciate the sentiments and prayers shared in the process.

There are quite a few examples of partings and departures in the Scriptures. Today's gospel reading is actually the start of Jesus' farewell speech to his disciples, following on from the last supper. He urges his disciples to love one another.

I was particularly drawn, though, to Paul's letter to the Philippians, because it's a letter that Paul writes after having been separated from the Philippians, in which he expresses his appreciation for the church in Philippi and prays for their ongoing life. Indeed, in the Message translation of the first verse of chapter 4, Paul says:

My dear, dear friends! I love you so much.

I do want the very best for you.

You make me feel such joy, fill me with such pride. Don't waver. Stay on track, steady in God.

And that's pretty good for what I want to say. It fits with the theme I've come back to more than once: that to each of us God says: you are my child, you are beloved, I delight in you.

In the part of the passage that we've heard this morning, Paul goes on to talk about **loyal companions** and **co-workers** in the gospel. I'm so glad that that's a fundamental element in the life of the church here in Frankston – that the worship, witness and service of the church is shared and enabled by all of us, in many different ways. It's something for which we can be very thankful. No one of us can be all things to all people, but together we share in the ministry of Christ through the church. It is a blessing to be a part of it.

In Jesus' farewell to his disciples he gives them some special instructions – in particular, to love one another. Paul, also, offers some instructive words to the church in Philippi. I'm going to start with one that's quite pertinent because of what's happening in the week to come.

Next weekend there are two votes, both of which are significant.

On Sunday, you who are members of the congregation here will be able to hear the discernment of the Joint Nominating Committee about a recommended call for a new minister here, and vote on whether to extend a call to that person. At least for this vote there is no extended lobbying – indeed, I don't even know who's being proposed. At this stage that's appropriate to the process as that person's ministry elsewhere could be undermined if their name was bandied around. But what I do know is that the Joint Nominating Committee have already been putting lots of consideration and prayer into their discernment. This will be about hearing God's call and imagining how the Spirit may lead in new ways through a new placement into the future. It's exciting times, and I'll be praying for you.

The other vote next weekend is, obviously, for the Federal election. Amid all of the promises of candy and the slurs and accusations and the occasional serious policies Paul's advice is rather pertinent. Paul basically says: [whatever is good, true, reputable, and gracious](#) – I'm drawing from the Message translation again – [keep your attention on these things!](#) Turn down the noise, but listen for the creation, for compassion, and for care. I say 'creation' in this because God made creation good. I say 'compassion and care' because God made us for community and lives that Jesus.

When Paul says "keep your attention on what is good", it's pretty good advice for during an election campaign. Keep looking out for creation, compassion and care, turning down the rest of the noise, and you will do well. It's good advice for during election campaigns, but it's good advice for all of life, too.

Along with that, Paul also urges us [to rejoice – rejoice lots - and be gentle; to pray, and know God's peace.](#)

Rejoicing and being gentle make a good pairing: celebrating God together, and all that is good, which can be exuberant, but not being overbearing – being humble and respectful. It's like we hear in Micah: [act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God](#) - it has the 'humble' part at the same time as the 'with God' - thankful for God's blessings and mindful of God's concern for justice. Hence our activity is underpinned by our prayer; and Paul is confident that in that being "with God" we will know God's peace.

Paul writes all of this while he himself is in prison, according to the first chapter of this letter. Even under guard, Paul rejoices and prays with thanks as he reflects on how the ministry of Christ is shared and goes on through all of the coworkers and companions he's had the pleasure of partnering with, and as he remains focused on what is good and true: creation, compassion and care, in the knowledge of God's love in Christ.

I'm not going to prison... but I'm confident of feeling the same way as Paul in that rejoicing and thanksgiving, and I do pray that as you continue to faithfully love and serve, share and pray, that God will continue to bring blessing through you, and to you, always.
To the glory of God.