

## Philippians

It is a quiet Tuesday morning here at church as I write these words. Vacation Bible School is over for another year and as I think about last week this passage from Paul's letter to the Philippians comes to mind. Are the echoes of last week's praise and laughter and song still filling the spaces in the building? For me they are. And smiles - especially smiles - signs of all the life that is evident when people work together.

I remember what was filling my mind a few weeks ago - we had just learned that the square dancing that I had so looked forward to was going to be line dancing instead. I was not happy. The only reason I showed up was because I am the pastor and I had to. What a wonderful surprise line dancing turned out to be for me and for most everyone who came! Looking back I remember the laughter and the willingness to try something new.

You and I get to choose where to set our minds. They tell me that a word of criticism is remembered seven times as much as a compliment. There is great power in being negative. But Paul invites us to give power to what is true and right and honorable, to give power in our lives and our hearts to those things worthy of praise. War, troubles in the economy, people we love losing their jobs, the Cleveland Indians losing, the over emphasis on sports in our culture, sickness, people not putting God first in their lives - there is an abundance of things that can drag us down. Paul himself writes about some things he endured: five times he received the forty lashes minus one, three times he was beaten with rods, once he received a stoning, three times shipwrecked, a night and a day adrift at sea (2 Corinthians 11:24-25). But it was not on these things that Paul set his mind but on the power of God in the midst of them.

Some among us are facing severe challenges at this time. Many of the rest of us are not. But all of us can set our minds on those things that show the power of God in our lives and joy in the gift of life that God gives.

From my North Dakota days I remember hearing many stories. One that has stuck with me most was a woman telling of the darkest days of the dust bowl and the neighbors gathering at dusk, pushing back the furniture and dancing all night, walking home when dawn had come. She was just a girl then but that choosing of life and joy and laughter in the time of loss and despair stayed with her for a lifetime.

We may not get to choose what things happen to us and our world but we can choose where to set our minds. Setting our minds and hearts on the joy and life that God gives is never a bad choice.

Peace be with you.  
Pastor Schlessman

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