

Philippians 2:1-13 A Gap in the Canopy
October 1, 2023

The house in my neighborhood that puts Halloween decorations in the yard, began decorating before I left for vacation on Labor Day weekend. At least part of our culture is pre-occupied with the shadowy side of life. Everyone seems to love a good murder mystery.

The, “Man from UNCLE,” died this week, better known more recently perhaps as, “Ducky,” the medical examiner on NCIS, which, along with other crime dramas, gives us a weekly dose. Dr. Mallard talked to the dead. The world, of course, has always had a troubled side.

Oddly enough, the early Christian community did little more than mention their world situation. Often archaeology and historical studies and other disciplines, are needed to better understand the world of the Bible. There are some oblique references to the reign of Claudius and Nero and the Jewish War. It was the time of the early Roman Empire, and there was always something going on and much of it was in the shadows.

For the most part, the story of early Christianity is told on a more intimate level; how should/did the early Christ-followers attempt to live out their lives in this wonderful, but also deeply troubled world? That seems like a pertinent question for us.

In a nearby park there is a trail through a wood that has captured my attention over the last few years. The area is inhabited by tall leafy trees that create a shaded space beneath a canopy which is brought to life by the sun shining through the leafy cover like stained glass, especially in the spring with the new green and the fall with the yellow and orange as the seasons change.

There is a particularly beautiful spot where a large tree has been broken in two and fallen sometime in the past, creating a gap in the canopy that allows the light to shine down to the younger trees on the floor of the wood, bringing the spectacularly lighted color down to the ground.

It took me several walks to notice the remnants of the fallen tree that created the open space. Actually the other day I discovered another tree as well, making two of them. I don't know when the trees fell, it must have been some time ago. There are many fallen trees, but these two left a gap that lets in the light.

The 2nd chapter of Philippians is one of the premier passages in all of Paul's letters and like the repeated singing of great hymns, should be read and heard over and again on a regular basis, because this text acts in a way just like the gap in the canopy and sheds light on life down on the ground and helps us answer our question. There are other texts as well.

We read the Christmas and Easter accounts at least once each year, and occasionally parables like the

Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son or the Unmerciful Servant, and other gospel stories, and Old Testament classics like David and Goliath or Moses in the Basket on the Nile.

And the other Pauline gems from Romans 3 (we are justified by grace through faith) or 8 (I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me, and nothing can separate us from God's love) or 1 Corinthians 13 (the greatest is love) or Philippians 4 (rejoice in the Lord always). To these we add this one, which includes what is thought to be an early Christian hymn.

It tells *us* how to live out *our* lives in this world, and is as applicable today as it ever was. It speaks of things that even today are still on the world's to-do list, the believer's to-do list.

It tells us that the foundation of life is union with Christ, which is sometimes experienced as the comfort, compassion, and kindness of the Lord, and the experience of that union is what sustains us in life as well as brings believers together.

On its basis, we are to be like-minded, united in spirit and purpose. It asks of us humility, and the difficult and scarce capacity to think of others, to put our feet in someone else's shoes and walk a mile or two, and consider their interests as well as our own.

And the hymn offers the example of Christ, who did not think or act selfishly, but gave himself as a sacrifice. It wasn't too long ago that we read from the

12th chapter of Romans those challenging words, "offer your bodies as living sacrifices." It is this kind of life that is sanctified and pleasing to God.

Of course, it is more than what any person is able to do, but in relation to God, it is worthy of our consideration and effort, because God is able to bring it into reality by indwelling us. And that is the meaning of the exhortation that accompanies this hymn,

"Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, to will and to act according to God's good purpose."

The Christian faith is known for a vast array of diverse expressions that include sacraments and rituals, architecture, art, hymnody and music, doctrinal expressions, organizational styles, you name it. It is nearly impossible to sort it all out. One can hardly see the forest for the trees.

This text is one along with the others that lets in the light. We see words like kindness and compassion and love and humility.

We are confronted with a realistic expectation, that we work hard to nurture salvation in our lives; that we understand *this* meaning of our faith, that God is working in us, at no matter what stage in life or in faith development we are. The life of faith is not a far reach, it is like many other aspects of life . . . a work in progress.

Because God is at work in us, we can work at it as well, always keeping front and center the example of Christ, who came down like the light of the sun and lived as one of us, and died, and yes, rose again.

Taking care of ourselves.

Thinking of others in all we do and say.

Following Christ's example to the best of our abilities.

This is like the light reaching the floor of the wood, through the gap in the canopy to where we live, near where the broken trees have fallen, illuminating our days, to the glory of God.

The Particular Baptists

1 - No direct Anabaptist or General Baptist connection

2 - 1638 Spilsbury Church: Spilsbury, Kiffin, Knollys. A split in a church, half went to Plymouth with John Robinson (persecution), the other half stayed in London and became Baptist at some point. "Praise God Barbon."

3 - Particular versus General Baptist
Calvin versus Arminius
Augustine versus Pelagius
(Paul versus James)

4 - Scriptures:

Romans 8 and 9

Romans 10

Ephesians

5 - Nature of Grace and Faith and Election

Grace versus works

God versus human

Predestination versus freedom

6 - Modified Calvinism

Next week, the American experience

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