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St. Stephen's Church (Sewickley, PA)

9-10 January 2010 – Epiphany 1: The Baptism of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Texts: Isaiah 42:1-9, Philippians 1.1-11, Luke 3:15-16,21-22

Series: Ode to Joy: Paul's Letter to the Philippians

Title: "God Is Not Your Co-Pilot"

Isaiah 42:1-9 Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. ² He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; ³ a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. ⁴ He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law. ⁵ Thus says God, the LORD, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it: ⁶ "I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, ⁷ to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. ⁸ I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols. ⁹ Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them."

Philippians 1:1-11 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons: ² ¶ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³ ¶ I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸ For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. ⁹ And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Luke 3:15-22 As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, ¹⁶ John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." ¹⁸ ¶ So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people. ¹⁹ But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by him for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, ²⁰ added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison. ²¹ ¶ Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, ²² and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

1. Intro

- a. Quote from 30 Rock: “Real love is never letting the other person see who you really are.”
- b. This is just an indication from the culture how anxious people are—living in fear.
- c. Which of these two words describes your life, reflecting over the last week:
 - i. Joy or Anxiety?
- d. As we begin this new sermon series, I want to talk about Joy and Anxiety.
- e. The sermon series is called “Ode to Joy: Paul’s Letter to the Philippians,” so it’s about joy. That’s something Paul, the author, has a lot of.
- f. But he’s writing to people who have a lot of anxiety.
 - i. Phi 1:28: he prays that they may be “not frightened in anything”
 - ii. Phi 4:6, he tells them to “Have no anxiety about anything...”
- g. People like us. We are Anxious people!
- h. How do I know you have anxiety?
 - i. How many times in a week I talk to people who aren’t sleeping.
 - ii. The fact that 80% of all 10-year-old girls diet.
 - iii. The unbelievable numbers of people who use anti-depressants and anti-anxiety meds.
 - iv. Not to mention the very existence of Las Vegas.

2. Segue:

- a. So we’re anxious people—just like the Philippians. And I want to talk about that a little bit, and point at one of the reasons Paul, who had lots of reasons for anxiety, had this amazing joy. But before I do that, it’s important to do a little background here on this book.
- b. It’s amazing what people don’t know about the Bible. I just say “Philippians” and for many of you it’s like I just said “I’m going to give a lecture entitled ‘19th cent German Romanticism and the rise of Psychoanalytic Theory.’” Blah blah blah.

- c. But the Bible is God's word, God speaking to you. That's sort of important. But it was inspired by God and written down by specific people in specific times and places.
- d. So to understand it, sometimes you need to know who's writing it, to whom, and why.
- e. So here's what you need to know about Philippians:
 - i. Part of the New Testament.
 - 1. NT has Gospels, History, Letters, and Revelation
 - 2. This is one of the Letters
 - ii. By Paul (who was Paul?): Converted Jewish leader, missionary, church planter.
 - iii. When: 62 AD. 30 years after Christ's death and Paul's conversion. Probably about 10-12 years after he planted the church in Philippi. And about 2-3 years before he would be martyred.
 - iv. To Church at Philippi.
 - 1. Roman colony. Now in Greece. Near Serbia and Bulgaria and Turkey. (Map)
 - 2. Paul started this church. Most amazing short-term mission trip of **all time!** God told them to go there in a dream! They did an amazing exorcism! And when they were put in jail, God sent an earthquake to get them out! And their jailer became a Christian! (Read Acts 16.)
 - 3. The church: Some Jews, some Gentiles. Socio-economically mixed. Some ministry leaders (Bishops mentioned in the greeting)
 - v. Why'd he write it?
 - 1. To say thank you. They supported him financially.
 - a. Phi 4:10 I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me; you were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity.
 - b. Phi 4:18 I have received full payment, and more; I am filled, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.
 - 2. But mostly because they were freaking out. As I said, anxiety. They were worried about Paul, who was in prison. They were worried about

persecution. They were worried about challenges to their faith, partially from some false teachers in their midst. They were worried about their finances. They also had a big quarrel going on in their church. So lots of anxiety.

3. Main Point:

- a. We'll talk about all that as we go through the book.
- b. But today, we just look at Paul's intro here. And it's important to remember, as I said, that these Philippians have some real worries, some real anxieties.
- c. In light of that, I want to point out **two things**
 - i. **First: he was writing to Christians.** And some of them were leaders:
 1. Verse 1:1: "Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the **saints in Christ Jesus** who are at Philippi, with the **bishops** and **deacons**"
 2. And he says in v. 1.5 that he's "thankful for your **partnership in the gospel** from the **first day** until now."
 3. So these are serious believers, some in leadership, they are partners with Paul for the Gospel—for 10 years. These aren't lukewarm people.
 - ii. **Second, look at how Paul encourages them:** by reminding them of **God's sovereignty** in their lives.
 1. In almost all his letters (except Galatians, where he's really ticked off), he starts with a prayer, a kind of an encouragement. And so he says "I'm praying for you," but the first real word of encouragement he offers is this:
 2. Phi 1:6 "And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."
 3. In other words, he reminds them that **GOD began the work** in them, and that **GOD will bring it to completion.**
- d. **Why do I point out these two things? What does this mean? Two Big Ideas.**
 - i. The **First Big Idea** is that, for Christians, if you're anxious, **you are normal.**
 1. In the first century and the 21st century. I'm not saying it's good, I'm not just saying "whatever"—but simply that anxiety appears to be a reality for us. It may come and go—but often we find as soon as one thing is

resolved, we find something new to be anxious about. That's why Paul had to write Philippians and all these other letters because these communities of believers were often anxious.

2. It's important to get this because Christians often make other Christians feel guilt for worrying or being anxious.
 - a. I heard a sermon once where the preacher just told everybody to "Stop worrying!" As if! As if we could just turn that off.
 - b. What Philippians says is that anxiety will probably always be there, sometimes more, sometimes less, and the proper response is not to add to your anxiety by being more anxious, but by saying, "Hey God, you know what. I'm anxious again. I give my cares to you. Help me to trust you. Amen." And pray that again and again.
- ii. The **Second Big Idea** here is what Paul tells these anxious people: Remember that God started you on this journey, and he'll get you to the end (and there's an end—the "day of Jesus Christ" when all is made right).
 1. This is an amazingly encouraging reminder.
 2. When we forget this, that's when a lot of the anxiety just gushes in.
 3. Anne Lamott writes how, when she was in the early days of being a single mom, she had to remind herself that God didn't bring her this far to drop her on her head now.
 4. And it's this reminder Paul gives to these dear, anxious Christians at the beginning of this letter. This is the main thing. God was with you at the beginning, he's with you now, and he'll get you where you need to go.
 5. And he talks about being "partakers of grace." This is language referring to the cross, the place where we see definitively the extent of God's love for us and commitment to us.

4. Final Word:

a. Sum up: What have we said:

- i. Philippians was written by St. Paul to some anxious people.
- ii. First thing to note is that these were not some just-converted Christians. They were serious leaders in the church. And they were anxious. So there's a sense

that anxiety is kind of normal. And we don't need to be anxious about being anxious. Just keep turning it over to God. (Like a person in hot potato)

- iii. Second, Paul's big reminder to them, his first encouragement in his opening statement is a reminder that God is in control and that he has a good and loving purpose for them: Verse 6:

- 1. "And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."

b. Illustration/Implication.

- i. You ever see those bumper stickers that say "God is my co-pilot"?
- ii. What Paul is saying here is that that is wrong.
 - 1. Lord have mercy if I'm steering!
- iii. Philippians says that God is the pilot. He'll get you there.
- iv. You just chill in the back seat.
 - 1. The Christian life is one of active passivity. You actively trust God, and then rest in him. The Bible talks about our Christian faith as "entering God's rest."
 - a. You actively trust him by sitting at his feet (church, prayer, reading scripture, fellowship)
 - b. But all of this is based on resting in the God who loves you, who began and will complete the work in you.
 - 2. So remember, God is not your co-pilot. You're in the back seat. Trust the driver. Listen to what he tells you on the way. And enjoy the view.

5. Conclusion: Pray.