

**SERMON AT GELORUP 11 OCTOBER 2020: GEOFF CHADWICK  
THE 16<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY AFTER PENTOCOST (OS 38)  
DISAGREEING WITHOUT BEING DISAGREEABLE**

**2nd Reading**

**Philippians 4**

*<sup>1</sup> Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved. <sup>2</sup> I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. <sup>3</sup> Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. <sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. <sup>9</sup> Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you. <sup>10</sup> I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. <sup>11</sup> Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. <sup>12</sup> I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. <sup>13</sup> I can do all things through him who strengthens me. <sup>14</sup> In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress. <sup>15</sup> You Philippians indeed know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you alone. <sup>16</sup> For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs more than once. <sup>17</sup> Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that accumulates to your account. <sup>18</sup> I have been paid in full and have more than enough; I am fully satisfied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. <sup>19</sup> And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. <sup>20</sup> To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen. <sup>21</sup> Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The friends who are with me greet you. <sup>22</sup> All the saints greet you, especially those of the emperor's household. <sup>23</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.*

**End of the reading**

Over the last week or so I have been discussed at the behaviour of those who want to foster political divisiveness. The so called Presidential debate between Mr Trump and Mr Biden, tipped me over the edge of disgust. What I witnessed on TV was behaviour that I would not

tolerate in my classroom -bullying, interruption, name calling, unsubstantiated statements and downright mean-ness.

I know that many of our political systems (including Synod) are set up using an adversarial model to stop leaders having unfettered power, there is always the danger of turning opposition into opposition for the sake of opposition. Although Governments my claim mandates, it is opposition that is meant to keep them honest.

But opposition is not meant to be unsubstantiated obstinacy. When that happens, we end up with debacles like the one we recently witnessed on TV.

Curiously, the Philippian Church was a bit like that. If you read between the lines, Paul is appealing to the early church members to be agreeable. He wants them to stop arguing and get on with one another. In a town, like Philippi, society was stratified – and the strata avoided one another as much as possible – except in church. This, in fact, was the power of the Gospel. It was a big step for those early Christian. If you wanted to follow Jesus, you had to put you scruples about other people to one side. I recently received a blog that put it like this:

*The first-century church was like nothing else in Roman culture. It was shocking. All were welcome. All were valued.*

*Two thoughts on this: First, it was beautiful—a picture of heaven on earth.*

*Second, it was hard.*

*Don't miss this. At church, the slave and master shared a meal.*

*During the week, the slave obeys the master.*

*It was messy. It was confusing. Some appreciated Rome. Some hated Rome.*

*There were massive cultural differences.*

*It shouldn't have worked. It didn't work anywhere else. And yet it did.*

*Why? Because we have more in common at the cross than what separates us everywhere else.*

*And, I believe that the shocking diversity present in the first-century church was incredibly magnetic.*

*It was one of the factors that contributed to the explosive growth the church experienced.*

*(Jon at Breeze, 8 October 2020)*

So Paul writes into this context at Philippi. Yes, he tells them off! Euodia and Syntyche get a special mention! But he doesn't leave the people in chastisement. He gives them a better way. In today's world we might call it a *Code of Conduct*.

Let's pick out a few key concepts from this *Code*:

- Rejoice always
- Let gentleness be known
- Do not worry
- Be in Prayer, supplication and thanksgiving

- Work for peace which passes all understanding
- Think about whatever is:
  - true
  - honourable
  - just
  - pure
  - pleasing
  - commendable
  - excellent and
  - praiseworthy

Now this is not meant to be some sort of “Pollyanna” “namby-pamby” “Mother and apple pie” thinking. It not about changing the world simply by being naively nice. No! It’s about:

- being in the midst of disagreement without being disagreeable.
- knowing the strength of gentleness.
- being worried, without letting the world consume you.
- praying even as you are being bullied.
- finding *the eye of peace as the cyclones whorls about you.*
- minding our tongues so to speak truth, honour, justice, purity, commendation and excellence. Even when – and especially when- other sort of words are in danger of coming out!
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None of this is easy! Let me tell about an encounter I once had.

In the late 1990’s the issue of Aboriginal Land Rights was big. Being a priest amongst farmers, I went visiting those who were convinced that the Archbishop had told all the farmers to give their land back to the Aboriginal people. This was an inaccurate, simplistic view, and was a twisting of what had been said. Anyway, I recall visiting a disaffected farmer in his machinery shed. After the pleasantries, he picked up a chisel gouged the workbench with it and sad: “So what does the b... Archbishop think he’s doing by telling us to give our land back to the Aboriginal people (that’s not the term he used!) Now was not the time to talk about the legal subtleties of the extinguishment of Native Title! (Later- yes.)

Under threat, I remember making the conscious decision to stay rooted to my spot. Moving forward would be threat to him; and moving back would be cowardly retreat. And so, staying put I said:

“You seem to be pretty angry about that!”

And then tumbling out of his mouth came a long litany of hurts, disappointments, and struggles of his life on the land.

I said very little and listened as best I could – agreeing with what I considered to be true and gently disagreeing with what was untrue. Eventually it all calmed down and I was invited for morning tea!

To this day I strongly believe that the Holy Spirit, and some good listening skills training were keeping me safe that morning!

So, being in the midst of disagreement without being disagreeable is not easy, but it is what called to.

It is remarkable to think that in the early days of the Christian church it's greatest attraction was its most difficult problem; How to keep the vision of Jesus alive where the once "never together" are "always together"

*"The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. 9 Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet." 10 Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests (Mtt 22: 9-10, NRSV)*

Now here's a little quote I found on our Local Uniting Church's website. It's based on the writings of the Anglican Priest Kenneth Leech (15 June 1939 – 12 September 2015), who was very active in working with the poor and outcast in London:

*Beware!*

*Here we endeavour to practice the inclusive Gospel of Jesus Christ. This means that you may be gathering with Tax Collectors, Thieves, Adulterers, Hypocrites, Women and Men, Young and Old, Female and Male Clergy, Gays and Lesbians, the Disabled, the Dying, Aboriginal and Islander Australians, Europeans, Asians, Americans and other ethnic minorities, Bigots, Heretics, Agnostics, Atheists, Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, Hindus and strangers from foreign lands ... anyone like the people whom Jesus met and ate with. So beware, we welcome you all.*

*(Adapted from Kenneth Leech, St Botolphs welcome)*

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The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**