**Sermon 7/14/19**

**Philippians 2:1-18**

There was a teacher who taught two 4th grade classes each day.

One day the teacher introduced a game called "balloon stomp" to both groups.

A balloon was tied to every child's leg.

The object of the game was to pop everyone else's balloon,

           while protecting one's own.

The last person whose balloon hadn't been popped would be the winner.

In the first class when the teacher said "GO", the students really got into the game.

A flurry of activity and shouting filled the room,

       as children stomped on each other's balloons.

A few of the children clung to the sidelines like wallflowers at a middle school dance,

        trying to protect their own balloons.

But their balloons were doomed just the same.

The entire battle was over in a just a few minutes, leaving only one balloon intact.

Its owner was, of course, immediately the most disliked child in the class.

He had all it took to be a winner.

He was pushy, rude, offensive, and he was determined to win at all costs.

Later in the day, the 2nd class was introduced to this same game.

However, this class was made up of mentally handicapped children.

Perhaps the instructions were given too quickly for them to fully grasp the goal.

They did understand the balloons were to be popped.

But they approached the game in a different way from the first class.

Instead of fighting each other, they began to help each other pop balloons.

One little girl knelt down and held her balloon carefully in place

          while a young boy stomped it flat.

Then he knelt down and held his balloon for her.

It went on like this for several minutes until all the balloons were destroyed.

Then everybody cheered, because everybody won.

What made the big difference between the two classes?

The first class saw the game as:

          This is MY balloon and I have to protect it.

          The others are THEIR balloons, and I have to destroy them.

          And so they fought to be the winner, and make everyone else the losers.

The 2nd class saw the game as:

WE want to win, so we will work together to pop all the balloons.

They looked out for everyone's interests.

It wasn't about ME; it was about all of US.

Paul reminded the Philippians that each of them should look

        not only at their own interests, but also at the interests of others.

Their attitude and goal ought to be the same as that of Jesus.

          "Since there is encouragement in Christ, comfort from love,

          participation in the Spirit, and affection and sympathy,

          complete my joy by being of the same mind."

The God of the universe, loved us so much, that one day he stepped out of heaven,

          taking on the very nature of a servant, made in the likeness of man,

          and started the journey toward his death on the cross.

He did this for us to give us a new attitude,

          a new understanding, a whole new way of living.

He did all this for us, so we could experience his joy and peace.

Paul's letter is full of joy and rejoicing.

The first class of students found no joy or rejoicing.

          They were angry and disappointed, and all but one, were "losers".

The second class experienced the joy, and fun, and excitement,

          of working together to accomplish their goal.

Paul encouraged the Philippian church to strive for spiritual unity.

Strong-minded though he was, Paul never worked alone.

Paul depended on their partnership in spreading the Gospel.

The warmth in this letter comes from his confidence that

         the Philippian Christians were his partners, sharing in God's grace.

He was strengthened and encouraged by their prayers, and their fellowship.

Together is important.

There is strength in numbers as each one supports, and encourages the others.

Together it is easier to face the uncertainties, and difficulties of life.

Paul did not want the believers in Philippi abandoning ship and going it alone.

He addressed them as a group, working together.

He knew that as we pray together, and work together,

       a bond of fellowship and love is formed.

There is strength in numbers.

Snowflakes are very tiny and very frail.

But if enough of them get together they can stop traffic.

Imagine what we humans can accomplish if enough of us get together

to work together for God.

It is easy to think that what we can do is so small it won't make any difference to God

But we give what we have.

To someone it may be better than we could imagine.

God working with us, in us, and through us can make all the difference.

Even a little becomes much when it is given to God.

"If you've gotten any encouragement at all out of following Christ,

          if his love has made any difference in your life,

          if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you,

         if you have a heart, and compassion, if you care

         then make my joy complete, by having the same love."

God is able to turn evil into good.

During the Christmas season we celebrate

            the grand night God visited earth as a baby.

But to the rest of the universe the event looked like an astounding humiliation.

God, the Creator of all, took on the unimpressive body of a human being,

         to endure a confining life and grisly death on planet Earth.

Paul points to this death to show that God

          is able to take even the darkest moment in history and turn it into good.

The cross, and the empty tomb, prove that nothing is powerful enough

          to stamp out a reason for joy – joy in the Lord.

By his actions, God tells us:

           “I've done this for you. Now, you go and do that same thing for others.”

A pastor was preaching a sermon on the Lord's Prayer.

He pointed out that the Lord's Prayer is a "dangerous prayer,"

           because if God’s will is to be done on earth as it is in heaven

           it will result in a whole lot of rearranging down here!"

Jesus shows us how to set about doing a whole lot of rearranging down here:

           Imitate him, trust in the Spirit, work together in love.

Paul urged the Philippian Christians, and through his letters he urges us also,

         to live for Christ.

Because we have received the gospel, we ought to live in such a way

         which shows we are not only united to Christ, but also to one another.

Then we begin to experience the joy Paul experienced.

AMEN