

“Press On!”
Rev. Darcy Hawk
October 4, 2020

Philippians 3:4b-14

^{4b}If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: ⁵circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

⁷Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ.

⁸More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. ¹⁰I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, ¹¹if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

¹²Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

Oh what terrible news when someone announces, “Oh, I broke a nail.” I’ve done as much and it always promises to get worse. Thank goodness for *Press On Nails* the solution to all of our manicure related problems. My solution is to keep them very short and go get a screw driver to tighten that loose eyeglass screw. I’m guessing the Apostle Paul had no interest in good nail care or presenting the illusion that he didn’t have to work for a living. The style of long nails was developed to indicate the wearer had minions. The under-butler or scullery maid did all the things that might threaten a perfect manicure. Watching some folks work around long nails can be impressive but sometimes things happen and then one has to just press on. There is, however another solution called nail glue. If the problem isn’t serious enough to press on then maybe we just need to put a dab of glue on the offending fingernail. I understand Elmer’s glue all is not the remedy of choice. The option to just carry on, as I’ve explained will only make the situation worse ending in pain-filled tears.

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The niggling problem can be expressed by one person's stubborn is another person's persistent. When there is an array of solutions we are often forced to choose one which closes off the others. Having committed to a course of action it becomes increasingly difficult to admit it's not working. Paul gave it his best shot when Pharisaic Judaism was his only option. He did all the prescribed actions, said the right words, carried on in the face of diminishing returns; guilt and shame continue to plague him. His immediate response to an alternative course was opposition. It took a dramatic intervention to force him to see his “solution” wasn't solving anything.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote, “A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines.” The true hero is brave enough to keep an eye to alternatives. This is one of the important functions of confession. Honest appraisal of the way we came and thoughts about change for the future. So Paul's pressing on wasn't single minded, his writings show evolution and change in a deepening understanding of what it means to walk with Jesus. His presentation of another way, the way of faith, evoked in others the same response it evoked in him. As such he understood why it was hard for his brothers and sisters in the faith to abandon slavish obedience to the law. He trotted out his credentials to those who doubted. I don't think that was easy for him because he was all about stepping back and letting the Word speak.

When faced with a problem we rush to solutions, but our faith calls us to consider why there's a problem or even if there's a problem. Paul felt the weight of law and his inability to fulfill it and Jesus responded, “I've done it for you.” Now proceed with solving the real problems. In the end we might say, “Nevertheless she persisted.” Elizabeth Warren