

Reflection Sunday 20th September

Philippians 1: 21-30

For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me; and I do not know which I prefer. I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.

Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well—since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

When you were young did anybody ever say to you “God is watching you” or “Jesus is watching you”?

Was it a threat or a comforting message? It could have been either depending upon the tone of voice. If preceded by “Be careful what you do” or some such phrase it was more likely to be a threat in terms of “do wrong and you will be punished”.

That simple statement to a child can influence them for years to come in their perception of God – a punishing tyrant or a loving help and protector.

God is watching us, not that we might be punished but that we might experience his grace and love; that we might know the fullness of a loving creator who wants the best for us.

“Live your life in a manner worthy of the Gospel” Paul writes to the Christians in Philippi. Was that a threat or a word of encouragement?

On Friday Anita and I ventured into the Merry Hill Shopping Centre, a place we have not visited many times in the last 6 months. On the floor of the shopping centre are direction markers requesting people go one way along the main aisles to keep people safe. Such systems operate in many places. I know it is not always possible to keep to the appropriate route all the time but I was very much aware of people walking towards us – we were going the right way – people who had no regard for the encouraged route at all.

I was watching them – and no I did not challenge any of them.

People are always watching us as we live out our Christian lives; “live your life in a manner worthy of the Gospel”.

In these days of social distancing and the rule of six the way we respond expresses our care for others. Are we ignoring the “rules” for our convenience or keeping to them for the safety of others?

Sometimes it is difficult to know how we should express our love for others as our Christian natural inclination in the showing of love will be contrary to the rule of 6, social distancing and guidance re providing help and assistance and transportation; even the rule of love is not always easy to follow.

As people watch our living may they see the love of Christ being expressed in how we treat other people and treat the world in which we live. Yes, we will occasionally get it wrong but may we seek to live our lives for the Glory of God not because a tyrant wants to punish us but since a God of love is seeking to bless us and through us bless others.