

“Rose Colored Glasses”

Sermon by James Brassard
from Text of Philippians 4:2-7 and Exodus 32:1-14
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<http://ccpc.bowiemd.org/sermons.htm>

I purchased a hybrid car in January. It features a small gasoline engine sitting side by side with an electric engine. The engines run separately or simultaneously, but always seamlessly. We bought it because Andrea was driving 250 miles one way, each week to her job in new Jersey. Our other cars were old and we were worried about her getting stuck on the NJ Turnpike late at night. It is a great car, gets 50 miles to the gallon, and it give us **great comfort** to drive by Sonoco and see the sign, “Regular \$3.09,” and underneath that another sign, “looking for part time help.” They seem connected. To keep gas in your car you will need a part time job.

People who follow Christ are a **strange hybrid as well**. Christians are Children of God who are grateful recipients of God's full and complete acceptance. We have been given forgiveness by God through Christ and blessed with all the incomparable riches of God's grace and **yet**...we remain people prone to pettiness and disagreement and interpersonal conflict.

Christians are a **strange hybrid**. Sanctified and blessed---**yet sinful and stressed**.

The Biblical texts for today illustrate this hybrid nature of humanity . . .

While Moses was on Mt. Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments, the people got impatient for God's presence and Moses' leadership. They demanded that Aaron, second in command, make a golden calf god for them . . . thus breaking the core of the commandments. These children of God were the Chosen people **yet prone to idolatry**.

The book of Philippians contains the most rhetorically soaring and poetically pleasing piece the Apostle Paul ever wrote. It was written to his favorite Christian community—the church in Philippi. These loving people had paid for his care while he was in prison. They also took a special offering for the persecuted church in Jerusalem during a period of intense persecution of their own. Yet even in this wonderful community, Paul has to stop to take care of a troublesome dispute between two strong leaders.

“I urge you Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind as the Lord. Yes and I ask you, my loyal companions in Christ, to help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the great work of the Gospel.”

I don't know about you but I hate to break up a good sermon or spoil a happy moment by pointing out petty problems. It reminds me of this time of year in years past. The **Report cards would come home and I would review all good marks** and positive teacher comments. It was all so positive and affirming, and then I would spot it: “What is this C

in Social Studies? We have history books galore and top flight news magazines. How did that happen! Our dinner conversation and family travel alone should warrant an A-."

Then I would return to the good news, "Good work kids, let's go out for ice cream!"

I envision Paul pacing the floor of his prison cell dictating this letter. He was obviously on a writer's roll. A spirit of rejoicing and thanksgiving flow off his tongue.

- He is thankful for the spirit of peace and generosity of spirit.
- He details the great things they have done for him in jail.
- He quotes a hymn—"Jesus emptying himself and being exalted."
- He testifies how their prayer and example has helped him face possible execution.
- He goes so far as to say his time in jail has "*been a blessing.*"

He adds some local trivialities to personalize the spirit of their relationship and the hopes and struggles they share: "hasn't the Fall weather been great?—what about those Redskins? Doesn't Brunel look like he's 10 years younger?"

"Yes, God is great **all** the time **but** I have to tell you, those two Saints-- Euodia and Syntyche---WHY CAN'T WE ALL JUST GET ALONG?"

These woman are **undoubtedly leaders in Philippi**. The church in Philippi has always been led by women. In Acts, chapter 16, we learn the church was founded by a prominent woman merchant named Lydia who opened up her home and heart and her wealth. Her giving spirit set the tone for this generous and spirit filled congregation. Three of the five leaders mentioned in Acts 16 description of Church in Philippi are female. This is a similar story in all the early churches in the New Testament. Denominations that do not permit women to be full members and leaders in church suffer from the worst case of Biblical illiteracy and selective proof texting possible.

Euodia and Syntyche were common feminine names in those days. From now on I'll call them, Edy and Cindy.

Let's speculate a little. Edy was a pillar. Today her duties might include the head of Women's Association or the Sunday school superintendent. If there were a need, Edy would offer whatever was needed. Was she getting burned out?

Cindy was cut from the same kind of Servant cloth. Maybe she was the person **everybody turned to in need**. She was the center of mission work. She visited the sick and took meals to shut ins. Perhaps this hard driving leader was less than tactful. She might have been abrasive at times. . . impatient to get the administrative details done so other important things could be tackled.

We don't know the nature of the dispute.

We know it was important enough to address in this letter, but not important enough to point a finger in blame or to scold anyone.

Paul introduces this fence mending plea by saying:

“Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice.” **“Be of the same mind”** - this is code language for being humble and forbearing. Putting others first. Paul then reminds them of the urgency, “The Lord is near.”

Paul is telling them that time is short and vital work must be done. Focus on Christ.

Fred Craddock's friend Glenn Adsit had a long ministry in China. He was under house arrest in China when soldiers came one day and said, “You can return to America.”

Glenn and his wife starting celebrating their imminent freedom. The soldier said “You can take two hundred pounds with you.” Well, they had been there for years. They got out the scales and the family arguments started: two kids and husband and wife each with their own “MUST HAVE” lists. I must have this priceless vase. I must take this brand new typewriter. What about these books? The kids want their unique Chinese toys. Somehow they pared the list and finally put everything on the scales. Further heated negotiations followed producing further things being pulled off the scales. Finally they took things off till it was 200 lbs on the dot. The soldier asked, “Ready to go?”

“Yes.”

“Did you weigh everything?”

“Yes. . . 200lbs on the dot.”

“Did you weigh the kids?”

“No, we didn't.”

“Weigh the kids.”

In a moment the vase and books and artifacts and photographs all became trash.

Andrea and I are contemplating **our duet** for the Talent Show. . . "A Night at CCPC." We have on rare occasion sang karaoke. Always oldies. Our favorite is the Righteous Brothers' “We've Lost that Loving Feeling.” But singing that would raise some eyebrows!

One description of this text would be **“United we stand and divided we fall” - a one hit wonder** that Sonny and Cher used to sing on their Variety Show.

The song states a timeless truth: **“We are in this together.”**

Be it marriage, raising children, running a church or volunteer organization, any type of cooperative venture requires working through differences and resolving conflict. It is a "make it or break it" venture. United we stand OR divided we fall.

There is one ordination question every pastor, elder and deacon must answer in the affirmative . . . Will you seek to uphold the Peace, Purity and Unity of the church? Peace, unity and purity are **Interconnected**.

Everyone wants peace. But there can be no real peace without a unity of purpose born out of humility and common commitment to be obedient to Jesus Christ. There is no lasting unity without dealing with sinful behavior and its consequences. There is no peace without justice and fairness.

Conflicts usually come in two types. Even spiritually healthy people are still vulnerable in one of these two areas. The first type of conflict arises in what I like to call **“Personal slights.”** I didn't get noticed. I didn't get credit. My needs were not considered. Most

conflict arises from hurt feelings. Someone really believes they were not given enough respect and care.

As for me, I am not easily bothered by personal slights. I came from a big family. My Mother was direct and outspoken. I have been a pastor a long time and I am not thin skinned. I have learned to take very little personally.

But I learned that I need to be told when I have hurt someone's feelings by insensitivity or just lack of awareness.

Often—conflicts arising from hurt feelings can be resolved by the hurt party gently but clearly and privately—telling the offending party they are hurt and why.

The offending party needs to listen without getting defensive. . . acknowledge the hurt-apologize honestly and sincerely—and promise to make an effort to do better next time.

Paul says the key to resolving hurt feeling is being **forbearing**.
“**Let your gentleness be known to everyone,**” he said.

Servant leadership can get lonely. Even tireless Saints need encouragement.

Maybe Edy and Cindy would stop fighting if some others pick up balls they were juggling. Pitch in when ask for help . . . little things matter . . . sometimes just stopping by to listen to struggles and hurts make all the difference. Show them some love.

A second type of conflict and division arises from a difference in interpretation of the Bible and how Christians should be involved in the netherworld - Christians can get pretty riled up in a hurry!

There are various strengths and struggles of being a Presbyterian...we like to argue theology and we are concerned with the horrible injustice in the world - we can't just take a "don't worry, be happy" attitude - neither can we "go ballistic."

Theology and procedure *matter*....

The content and the conduct of the Christian life *are* important.

The Gospel is good news and following it *is* a serious matter.

Presbyterians have fought over every critical social issue for centuries....

- slavery and racism
- the role of women
- War and peace
- Qualifications and behavior required for leadership.

That said---we must be reminded often---the **core of the Gospel** is pretty basic.

Jesus Christ is Lord, and the God which Christ reveals is a God of love and expects us to love.

Doctrine and tradition are important but not essential. I keep telling myself that good and faithful Christians can have different understandings about a whole host of issues from..

- How the universe was created
- the ordination of women
- birth control and abortion
- stem cell research
- sexual orientation
- easy access to hand guns
- the importance of Mary, the mother of Jesus.
- the war in Iraq
- global warming. . . tithing . . . divorce . . . just the short list.

As a Christian and Presbyterian, I have convictions on all these issues, but I'm not sure that all of **my convictions are always right**

Joanna Adams is a prominent pastor in Atlanta. Twenty years ago she was selected to serve on a committee that charged with writing a Brief Statement of Faith that would bring together the theological traditions of the northern and southern Presbyterian bodies that reunited in 1983 after 120 years of division over the issue of slavery.

Some reconciliation record . . . 120 years.

Joanna was selected because she was a respected female pastor—and there were few at the time...a liberal member of the denomination on a committee representative of diverse theological conviction of Presbyterians. The committee met over a period of months and the members became good friends. So at General Assembly meeting one summer she and a male member of the committee, a southerner, prominent in very conservative circles of the church, met in the lobby of their hotel and were talking . As they stood chatting a number of colleagues and friends came up and greeted him and each time he graciously introduced Joanna to them.

Finally , Joanna exclaimed, " **My goodness, what is going on with all these people? They have been gracious to me, but I have never met them before.**"

He said, "They all want to meet you. My friends are always asking what you believe." What do you tell them?" I asked. "**I tell them that you love Jesus. Just as much as they do.**"

Paul ends this "detour of fence mending" by returning to his spirit of thanksgiving. You hear the confidence that the faith and unity the Philippians have shared will win out and reconciliation will prevail. He closes with a benediction we had to memorize in seminary, "And the peace that passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."