

Partnership in the Gospel

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Preacher: David Mulready

[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 28th of August 2005. The preacher is David Mulready.

His sermon is entitled Partnership in the Gospel and is based on Philippians 1.1-30.

Well, partnership can be applied to many areas of life.

The touring Australian cricket team could be regarded as a partnership. Those of you who have been married for many years could describe your marriage as a partnership.

People working together in business, people working together in whatever capacity. And partnership is also an excellent word to describe the association of Christians as they seek to serve and honour the Lord Jesus Christ.

[1 : 07] And so the music group this morning could be described as a partnership in ministry.

Those of you who are involved in any particular activity together, I noticed that after the men's breakfast yesterday, there was a partnership in the kitchen.

And afterwards, there was a partnership as the fellows were, and I think there were only fellows, but I may have been mistaken, doing the lawn mowing and doing the edging and all those sorts of things.

All sorts of partnerships in God's church. And I'm sure that many of you are in partnership in ministry within the life of Holy Trinity.

In fact, I'm going to do something a little unusual. I'm going to ask the members of staff just to put their hands up for a moment. Members of staff. Now, keep your hand up. People who lead services here.

Just put your hand up. People who do anything in the life of Holy Trinity Doncaster. Come on now, put your hand up. Anything at all. That's a sort of a sea of hands.

[2 : 13] Isn't that fantastic? You might put your hands down again. I feel like an auctioneer up here this morning. It's a tremendous privilege to be in partnership in God's work.

Well, the Philippian letter is not just a dry and crusty part of the Bible. I mean, there is no dry and crusty part of the Bible. It's not just a letter of the New Testament that's come down to us.

It is a letter written to a church. I mean, we could turn to the letter to Holy Trinity Doncaster, but it doesn't exist in the Bible.

But there is a letter to the Philippian Christians, to the Philippian church, a real church. And you can read about its formation in the book of the Acts. And the Philippian church was a church in partnership in God's mission.

We see how thrilled the Apostle Paul is through this letter because of their partnership with him in the cause of the gospel.

[3 : 15] And if you care to turn to the Bible in front of you, the translation is slightly different, but in verses 4 and 5 of chapter 1, he says, In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your sharing or because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

And then in verse 7, he speaks about all of you share in God's grace with me. They were in partnership in the work of the gospel and it brought Paul great joy.

The Philippian church was a church in mission. They were going somewhere. They were making a difference for Christ in their world. They were concerned that the gospel of Jesus Christ be made known far and wide in their community and further afield.

They wanted to see men and women and young people turn to Christ and be saved. And as we look at this letter this morning, we note seven aspects of their partnership in God's mission which may help you here at Holy Trinity to fine tune the mission of this church.

And I'm going to challenge you over morning tea as you have morning tea together and as you talk about other things that you might have been doing during the week.

[4 : 50] As you talk to one another, see how many of the seven you can remember and identify. Now there's a challenge to you. Seven aspects of partnership.

And they all start with the letter P so they're easy to remember. The first is that of prayer. We can see it in chapter 1 verse 19 where Paul says I will continue to rejoice for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.

The Apostle Paul was in prison for the sake of the gospel as he wrote this letter. And he was conscious that the Philippian Christians were praying for his ministry.

They weren't necessarily praying for his escape, for his release so that he could be out preaching somewhere. We know that the whole prison guard was hearing the gospel.

We know that other prisoners were hearing the gospel. people. And I'm suggesting that the prayer was that the gospel of Christ might be proclaimed by the Apostle Paul there in that particular situation.

[6 : 06] And every partnership in Christian work should be grounded in prayer. All of you people who put your hands up and those who were too embarrassed to put their hands up because they felt as though they were in Sunday school or something, when you are exercising your ministry, before you go and exercise your ministry, it should be grounded in prayer.

And I guess that there are opportunities provided within this church family for people to gather for prayer. It never ceases to amaze me that the parish prayer time is usually the worst attended meeting of any church activity, of any church program.

But of course that wouldn't be so here at Holy Trinity. I'm sure that there are large numbers and that's why the building was extended years ago so that you could fit in for the parish prayer times.

And I hope that some of you ring one another through the week and maybe pray over the phone.

It's a bit funny to do when you start doing it but Telstra, get a little bit out of it or Optus or whoever the provider and you're able to pray together in twos and threes in the group that you belong to.

When the musos gather for practice I assume that they pray together grounding what we're doing in prayer. I assume that the link missionaries with whom you're associated in Winton with the Bush Church Aid Society and in Russia and Nigeria and coming up in Egypt and other places that you are praying for those link missionaries.

[7 : 43] I trust that you also might consider praying for us in the Diocese of North West Australia. We covet your prayers and in the little leaflet that you've received this morning there's an action page.

If you would like to receive either by email or by snail mail the prayer notes every second month I put them together I'd be delighted to add your name to the list so that you might pray for us you might even consider adding us to the prayer list here during your church services.

So the first is prayer I hope you can remember that at morning tea the second one is proclaiming Christ in verse 18 the apostle Paul says that the important thing is that Christ is preached the important thing is that Christ that Christ is preached.

One of the great sadnesses of the Christian church today is that there are all sorts of messages out there at church and in Christian newspapers indeed in Anglican newspapers I am aghast in Western Australia sometimes at the quality of articles and the things that are reported it seems that Christ is often not preached indeed I received the bishops of the Australian church from time to time received copies of one particular bishop's sermons and I have given up reading them or even scanning them sometimes the name of Jesus is not even mentioned the Bible is not mentioned isn't that not a Melbourne bishop I hasten to add not a Victorian bishop I am not going to go any further than that but nevertheless the main thing is the main game is to be kept the main game isn't it proclaiming

Christ well I wonder if the proclamation of Jesus Christ is central to all of the activities in which you are involved in your local church and in your workplace whether you seek to proclaim the name of Christ in the family in the home it's really hard sometimes but the Philippian church was enthusiastic in proclaiming Christ the third quality is that they were involved in sending personnel personnel to be involved in ministry I would assume that over the years this church has sent Christians off to different parts of the world to proclaim the Lord Jesus Christ and I understand that there's some people going soon to Egypt and that is fantastic well the Philippians were like that the Philipian

church not necessarily a large church like this but they sent one of their number and we can read of him in chapter two his name was

[10 : 45] Epaphroditus and chapter two from verse twenty five Paul says I think it necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus my brother fellow worker and fellow soldier who is also your messenger whom you sent to take care of my needs and it goes on to speak about the ministry of Epaphroditus partnership may be sending one or more of your members to the diocese of north west australia wouldn't that be terrific we need people over there not just clergy we need people who are perhaps facing retirement who might leave their home here in downtown melbourne downtown Doncaster and come and live in one of our towns either short term or long term and be a witness for Jesus Christ we need people who will bring their jobs with them for a few years make a deliberate decision to come across to the north west to one of our towns to witness for Christ we have a couple who left diamond creek anglican church last year a psychiatrist

David Hickingbotham and his wife Pam who was a member of the church staff and they were looking for a ministry somewhere they went to the town of Karratha you can see it on your map on that little leaflet and they are serving Christ by David earning a living as a psychiatrist lots of people in western australia need a psychiatrist so that it's good that he's gone there and Pam and David throw themselves into ministry in the local church he didn't just apply for the job because there was a job going they moved to that part of australia to have a ministry we have a young couple in Kununurra who were just 30 years old and he's a carpenter he's left they've sold their home in sydney moved to the town of Kununurra not because of the 45 to 47 degree temperatures but because they wanted to serve christ in some remote place and there they are serving christ alongside the minister in a very small congregation making a difference in remote australia we sometimes have people who are on holidays and wander around our diocese maybe spending a week or two here or there doing some carpentry doing some painting on the rectory maybe spending a few weeks we've had a couple who have been in the parish of Exmouth while the minister went off to have major surgery in sydney for prostate cancer this couple who have just retired he's a bank manager and his wife is a school teacher just retired they've gone for eight weeks living in the rectory they take the church services do the preaching and have been a wonderful provision of god at their own expense so we need all sorts of people who might come perhaps it might be that holy trinity doncaster might send a team of people for a fortnight to conduct a mission in one of our towns you can see personnel are involved in partnership lots of opportunities how are we going what was the first one what was the second one what was the third one whoa they're getting less and less but you might not get your cup of tea this morning the fourth is pastoral care and we can notice in chapter one verses seven and eight and at the beginning of chapter four how the apostle Paul and the

Philippian Christians had a genuine love and care for one another let me ask you to answer this question in your heads how are you as an individual in the life of this church and I'm not speaking to any visitors who might be here this morning because you haven't had yet that opportunity but those of you who belong here week by week how do you show pastoral care for the members of your church family for the members who aren't here this morning the members who usually sit next to you I wonder where he is I wonder where she is I wonder whether you when you get home whether you might pick up the telephone and say are you all right lots of opportunities to show pastoral care you know it's often the the ministry team who are overlooked when it comes to pastoral care they are people too they have needs as well and as they are seeking to serve Christ and to serve you they need to be looked after

I wonder when was the last time that you reached out to a member of the ministry team seeking to ask them what can you pray what can we pray for you is there something that that I can do for you as a as a brother in Christ as a sister in Christ pastoral care I wonder with your link missionaries apart from being able to say yes they are our link missionaries and yes I put some money in the plate sometimes to support them there and our parish council sends money across to this ministry and that ministry do you make contact with the missionaries with those who are linked to your church apart from praying for them which is fantastic do you ever send them an email pick up the telephone send them a card a little note perhaps a gift to encourage them in their isolated and difficult task for Christ as members of this congregation who aren't here but who are somewhere else pastoral care is really important number five if you've lost count pecuniary support those of you who are under 30 will probably say what is that money doesn't start with the letter

P so there is the word pecuniary support financial support we find it in chapter 4 verses 10 to 20 the Philippian Christians were an amazingly generous congregation of God's people and the Philippians gave we see it in verse 16 they gave to the ministry in which Paul was involved again and again and we see their gift described perhaps even carried by Epaphroditus we see it in verse 18 he says the gifts well it actually says there doesn't it now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent and look at the description of their offertory I wonder when the offertory is taken this morning whether you would describe your gift in this way a fragrant offering an acceptable sacrifice pleasing to God wow what a description of the offertory an acceptable sacrifice pleasing to [18 : 09] God a fragrant offering the Philippian Christians were incredibly generous and the apostle Paul says in verse 19 of chapter 4 that God would enable them to be generous and their generosity gave him incredible joy every missionary society every Christian worker needs financial support and it is no different in the Diocese of Northwest Australia we have the Bush Church Aid Society supporting us we have individuals and church fellowships parish councils who support us we need support in order to be able to proclaim Jesus Christ to people who are scattered amongst the 25% of the Australian landmass Aboriginal people tourists farmers miners all sorts of people who are out there many of whom do not want to know a thing about

Jesus but we are seeking to proclaim Christ there I would encourage you not to shift your missionary giving from one place to somewhere else but to consider the possibilities of our needs in our diocese pecuniary support we're coming down the list and the second last one is pain pain we all love pain don't we we all love pain in in Philippians chapter one and towards the end of the chapter it is clear that the Philippians were suffering for Jesus Christ the apostle Paul says it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him and isn't that fantastic when we come to to faith in Jesus I came to faith in Jesus Christ when I was 17 40 years ago I'm not sure what your story is but it says not only to believe on him but also to suffer for him the Philippians were suffering for the name of Christ and he says since you are going through the same struggle that you saw I had and now here that I still have and there are Christians today even in Australia who suffer for the sake of Christ some are ostracised in their families when they become Christians we had a Muslim congregation sorry not a Muslim congregation a congregation of ex-Muslims in in Parramatta with an Iranian minister and they were many of them were ostracised from their families indeed there were death threats given to our minister because of the treachery that the Muslim community regarded them as having taken part in because they had turned from Islam to become Christians but I wonder how the people of Doncaster are suffering for the sake of Jesus

Christ some of you may be let me tell you a couple of ways in which you might be prepared to suffer for Christ one is that you might be prepared isn't it rude when some visitor comes along and tells people how to live but here is a suggestion it might be that you might decide deliberately to take a lower standard of living in order to more sacrificially support the ministry of this church it may be that you decide to take a lower standard of living in order to be able to more sacrificially support ministry in Russia your couple going to Egypt VCA in Winton and yes even in remote Australia and it may be that you decide to suffer for Christ by leaving this church family I would I've been encouraged to see yesterday morning and this morning there seems to be a genuine warmth in the life of this church you don't find that everywhere

I was speaking to a guy after the first service he said when I first started going to church in Melbourne I went to a particular church I walked in I was totally ignored I walked out I was totally ignored I came here to Holy Trinity I tried it out and I couldn't get out of the place that's great news that's exciting well it may be that God wants you to leave Doncaster and go to some other part of the world he might want you to go to remote Australia he might want you indeed to come to one of our towns in northwest Australia to leave the comforts of your church family and yes even the grandchildren and the kids to leave them behind and serve Christ somewhere else if God called you to do that would you be prepared to suffer for him there is an interesting question pain how are you going with the six P's so far there's one left perseverance perseverance the [23 : 31] Philippians were involved in ministry from the beginning to the day on which the apostle Paul wrote this letter did you notice that in our bible reading this morning he is filled with joy because of your partnership or your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now they were hanging in there persevering in that partnership and with their giving they were giving again and again you know sometimes it's hard enough persevering being a Christian I've known of Christians

who or people who purported to be Christians who've given it away even clergy who've given it away life just got too difficult the pressures were too much the pain of losing family members of all sorts of difficulties in life were just too great and people who claim the name of Christ no longer do

I want to say to you hang in there persevere in the Christian faith but not only persevere as Christians persevere in the partnership in the work of the gospel and all of those of you who put your hand up to indicate that you're involved in ministry partnership in ministry is not just to do something for a couple of months or six months or a year or two and I know that there are probably people here who have been serving Christ faithfully doing the same thing for many many years congratulations and may God strengthen you to continue to do that here is a quality which every Christian needs indeed it is a fruit one of the fruit of being a Christian perseverance and it is also something which every church needs persevering in the mission of God's church here and in other places with which you are linked so partnership with God and others in his mission to rescue men and women and young people from hell and bring them into

God's kingdom into friendship with the living God is the privilege and the responsibility of every Christian and every Christian congregation and we see from this Philippian letter seven qualities which were present in that first century church that made such an incredible difference in reaching their generation for Christ well may God help you to identify the strengths and perhaps to face the weaknesses of your own mission partnership so that you will be even more effective in the job that God has for you to do here in the Doncaster area and in other places where you have chosen to have a link may God strengthen us all as we persevere in mission let's pray our heavenly father we thank you for the privilege of partnership the privilege that you have called us into ministry with you partnership with you and partnership with one another and so we pray that you would help us in that partnership as the days and years go on and we ask it for Jesus Christ our saviour amen you