

September 16, 2007

Like Water to The Soul

Once there was a church, like all churches it was where God's spirit and humanity intentionally mix. It was a church where members "worked out their own salvation with fear and trembling", as St. Paul named, as well as joined together to be the body of Christ in the world. It was a church that was holy, horrible and all the in between.

At one point of time, or perhaps on a reoccurring basis, there were two members, active, committed, dedicated and faithful, two members who happened to both be female, who disagreed. The specifics on what they disagreed on are not known, and may have been "lost" over time to even the women. I suspect many of us know or have heard of those cases where some individuals grow to be disagreeable with one another as habit. These ladies, and their disagreements, as is the norm in church live, when not hidden or without effect on the church as a whole, it heightened the horrible and made it more difficult for the holy to shine. Neither was known to be right or wrong, good or bad, more or less in tune with God, they were know to be disagreeable, one to the other.

Word if the situation was received by one who was in spiritual leadership and relationship with the church from afar. It is not know if someone asked for this leader's intervention, though that is more likely as "rumor" and news did not spread in the same time distance as we are accustom.

The leader responded, acknowledged what he understand to be happening, then through an "in place" leader, addressing the behavior, the effect and naming how they might grow and live more closely as Jesus lived and taught. The leader was Paul, the church was the house church in Philippi, and the women were

There is a powerful word in this passage for all who seek to live and grow as followers of Jesus Christ. In hearing this passage in the context of guiding an "in place" leader on how to deal with the situation between the women and how to address it with the greater congregation, it places the call to be prayerfully in everything on the church as well as those who are a part of it.

It tells us that there were, are and will be differences within the church and that as "the church" the way to live in the midst of them is to be always prayerful as the church. This type of prayerfulness is not just about ensuring they join in prayer during worship, or that meetings or meals begin with prayer. It is about the church and all that is done

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it its name, being centered on God, considering not only what is apparent, considering how their actions, decisions, attitudes and life together glorify God, or enhance the reputation of Jesus.

This prayerful mindset calls all to acknowledge all others as worthy and wonderful in God's eyes. It is a prayer conscious that focuses on gratitude and celebration, not of their actions or accomplishments, but on God active in their midst and world.

To do everything in prayer is to know that things will not always go our way, or always be resolved. There is no record of how the "two" responded or if their habitual disagreeing ever changed. The church is not called to prayer when there is change, it is called to pray.. always .. continually .. to have the mind of Christ, to be the body of Christ.

Though this has been a story of a church, if too is the story, or a part of the story of the church universal, historical and future. Isaiah was also talking to "the church" a church that was doing all the "right" things for their edification, while God speaks through the prophet that the rights and rituals of the church can only become real connections between humanity and God when they serve as sign and symbol of lives lived for the sake of others in God's name – when the goals of God's people are to loose chains of injustice, set the oppressed free, share with the hungry, provide for the poor – see all of humanity as our own flesh and blood.

I once heard that the church at is best is like water to the soul – the church cannot become soul or center, yet is can open a channel for the refreshment, renewal and power of God. To do so, we must be a church that in everything first gives thanks, then lay our requests before God, and allow the peace of Christ to be our guiding light.

To be the church at prayer, to be water to the soul of those inside and those out, there is not a certain list of words or petitions we need remember and repeat, we need to set our minds, and hold before us always, whatever is true, whatever is noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, praiseworthy – as we have seen or heard – then put it into practice.