

Scripture for the 18th Sunday after Pentecost, October 4, 2020

Introduction to the Epistle Lesson: Philippians 3:4b-14

The letter of Paul to the church at Philippi comes from a grateful, compassionate and contrite church planter and apostle. Paul has been imprisoned for his spreading of the gospel. He writes to the Philippians about this and what this has actually accomplished for the spread of the gospel and for starting even more churches. Paul keeps this goal ever before himself, his followers and the people of the various faith communities under his direction. Listen to what Paul says about having a goal for his life and for the churches, chapter 3, verses 4b-14:

A Reading from Epistle Lesson: Philippians 3:4b-14 (The Message)

You know my pedigree: a legitimate birth, circumcised on the eighth day; an Israelite from the elite tribe of Benjamin; a strict and devout adherent to God's law; a fiery defender of the purity of my religion, even to the point of persecuting the church; a meticulous observer of everything set down in God's law Book.

⁷⁻⁹ The very credentials these people are waving around as something special, I'm tearing up and throwing out with the trash—along with everything else I used to take credit for. And why? Because of Christ. Yes, all the things I once thought were so important are gone from my life. Compared to the high privilege of knowing Christ Jesus as my Master, firsthand, everything I once thought I had going for me is insignificant—dog dung. I've dumped it all in the trash so that I could embrace Christ and be embraced by him. I didn't want some petty, inferior brand of righteousness that comes from keeping a list of rules when I could get the robust kind that comes from trusting Christ—*God's* righteousness. ¹⁰⁻¹¹ I gave up all that inferior stuff so I could know Christ personally, experience his resurrection power, be a partner in his suffering, and go all the way with him to death itself. If there was any way to get in on the resurrection from the dead, I wanted to do it.

Focused on the Goal ¹²⁻¹⁴ I'm not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. Friends, don't get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I've got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back.