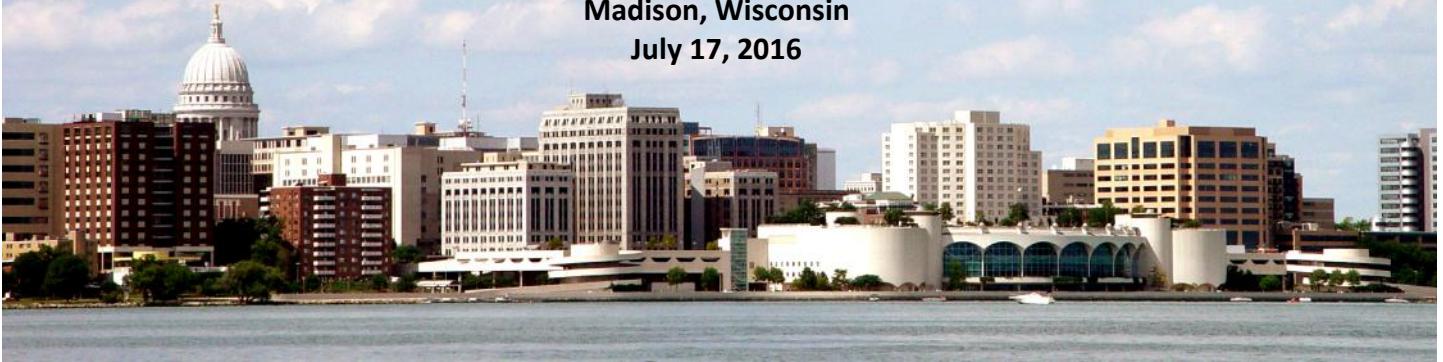


Euodia and Syntyche

PHILIPPIANS 4:1-3

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We know that this world is a place of almost constant conflict. We think of what just happened in France a few days ago, we think of what happened in Dallas a week before that, we think of what has been happening right here in the city of Madison. Conflict is a part of life. Nations fight over power and natural resources. Husbands and wives disagree over the family finances. Brothers and sisters fight over just about anything. I remember the very first fight between our two children. We were on our way to church, they were securely strapped in their seats, he was maybe 5 years old, she was maybe 2, and at some point he got her attention, reached as high as he could and said, "I can touch the ceiling, and you can't!" And at that point, the fight was on! I remember getting in a fight with my own sister over a box of wheat thins. Parents and children get into it. Neighbors get into it. Coworkers get into it. Supervisors and employees get into it. Fellow drivers out there on the streets of Madison get into it. It seems that conflict is simply a part of this life.

And so it should not surprise us, then, when conflict spills over into the Lord's church. Christians will have disagreements with other Christians. This morning, I would like for us to continue in our summer series of lessons on women in the Bible with a lesson actually on two women in the Bible who were apparently having some kind of rather serious disagreement with each other. The passage is Philippians 4:1-3, and the two women are Euodia and Syntyche (p. 1839). Several weeks ago, we studied Lydia, the first person to be baptized in Philippi on Paul's Second Missionary Journey. Paul would go on to baptize the jailor and his family. He left Philippi and kept on traveling, but some time later Paul would find himself under house arrest in Rome (a situation described in the last few verses of Acts), and from his own rented apartment in Rome, the apostle Paul wrote what we now know as the book of Philippians. We studied Philippians at our Bible camp this year, and then last week, Clint brought a powerful lesson from Philippians 4, a lesson on PEACE in verses 8-9. This morning I want us to back up a few verses as we get back to our series on women in the Bible. If you will, please look with me at Philippians 4:1-3. In Chapter 3, Paul warns about the danger of certain men teaching what is false, and we pick up in Philippians 4:1,

¹ Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved. ² I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. ³ Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

As we look at these two women, I want us to keep our Bibles open to this passage as we bring out four big ideas that we can apply to our lives today.

I. And the first big idea is the truth that THERE WILL BE CONFLICT IN THE CHURCH.

As Christians, we are God's family, and yet even as God's people, even being the saints that we are, we as God's people will not always get along. The church is described in the Bible as being a body, a kingdom, an army, a family. And as most of us know from personal experience, whenever people come together in any kind of a group like this, we have the potential for conflict. So the idea here at the beginning is: When we butt heads with a Christian brother or sister, let us not get disillusioned, but let us realize that this potential for conflict goes all the way back to the beginning.

I would emphasize here at the beginning, though, that the disagreement between Euodia and Syntyche does not appear to be doctrinal. In other words, this is not a matter of one of these two women teaching or believing something false. This isn't a question about baptism, or the Lord's Supper, or the resurrection, or anything like that. Remember: Paul just spent most of Chapter 3 warning about the danger of false teaching. So the issue is not a matter of Bible teaching, but it seems to be something in the realm of opinion. And I say this, because Paul very clearly does not take a side here. If one were right and the other were wrong, Paul would obviously come down on one side or the other. But as it is, he tells them to get along, and so it appears that we are dealing with some kind of personal issue, some kind of disagreement, there is some tension here.

Do good Christians ever disagree over some issue in the realm of opinion? Absolutely! Pews vs. Chairs. Which snowblower should we purchase? Where should we set the thermostat? Ultimately, we understand that we can disagree over matters of opinion, as long as we stand together on the word of God.

So the idea here at the beginning is this: Let us not get disillusioned when good people disagree. From time to time, there will be conflict – there will be personality issues in the church.

II. As we go back to this passage, there is a second big idea we need to notice this morning, and that is: Paul tells these two women to FIX IT! He tells them to DO SOMETHING! DO NOT LET THIS THING FESTER! Or, as he puts it in verse 2, "LIVE IN HARMONY IN THE LORD." And the idea here is: WORK IT OUT!

So yes, there will be conflict, but we are not to let these things go – we cannot stay in conflict. And what I find so amazing here is that Paul calls these two women out by name! Can we even imagine what that must have been like? Paul establishes this congregation with the baptisms of Lydia and the Jailor and their families, he keeps on going, somewhere down the line elders and deacons are appointed, Paul continues to travel, and a number of years later Paul writes this letter to the church in Philippi. The custom was that when a letter would arrive, the letter would be read publicly. And so we have somebody make an announcement, "We have a letter from the apostle Paul!" Maybe it gets really quiet, and the man starts reading the letter, "*Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus: To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons....*" He keeps reading, talking about how Paul is praying for this group, talking about the gospel being preached even though Paul is under house arrest in Rome, "*For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.*" Maybe we can imagine a few people saying "Amen" to that. "Yes, Paul! Right on! Right on!" We have Chapter 2 about the importance of being like Christ. We have Chapter 3 outlining Paul's past and warning about the danger of false teachers. And then we get to Chapter 4, "*I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord.*" Can we even imagine how embarrassing that must have been! Can we

imagine inserting the names of two women from this congregation? I'm thinking we could have heard a pin drop! How bad must this have been for Paul to call these women out by name! And here we are nearly 2000 years later, and we are still reading about this disagreement between these two women. So yes, there is no need to get disillusioned by conflict between Christian sisters, but once that conflict is identified, the Bible has a clear message: Work it out!

There is a danger, then, in letting any kind of conflict drag on. I think of what Paul wrote to the churches in the Roman province of Galatia in Galatians 5:15, where he said, **"...But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another."** If this animosity continues, there is a danger that the church might actually consume itself. I think of my college zoology class where the professor had a slide of one snake eating another snake, but there were tire tracks down the middle. They were so distracted by the battle between them that they failed to see the car! Paul says that the same thing can happen with us. And so the command here is: Work it out! Get over it! Make this right! I love how Eugene Peterson paraphrases these verses, **"I urge you Euodia and Syntyche to iron out your differences and make up. God doesn't want his children holding grudges."** And so he calls these women out publicly. When two people in the church have a beef with each other, and when it continues on for some length of time, it gets to a point where it is no longer a private matter, and it needs to be dealt with publicly.

The solution, Paul says, is that these two women need to **"live in harmony in the Lord."** They need the reminder that they are both **"in the Lord."** And so, as children of God, they need to get along. Paul didn't really care who did what first or who did what to whom or who started it – he just wants these two women to be okay with each other. And really, this fits in with what Jesus taught earlier. In Matthew, we have it from both perspectives. In Matthew 18, we are told that when somebody sins against us, we are to take it to them privately, if that doesn't work we are to bring along two or three witnesses, and if that doesn't work we are to take it to the church. Well, that's if somebody sins against us. Sometimes, though, we don't know what the problem is. Have you ever been in that situation? There is obviously something wrong, this person isn't talking to me (or whatever), but they haven't really sinned against me. In that situation, if we think somebody has a problem with us, we also have an obligation. In Matthew 5:23 Jesus addresses what happens if we think somebody has a problem with us. Do you remember that passage? Jesus said (in Matthew 5:23-24), **"Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering."** So it goes both ways. If somebody sins against me, I need to take the first step to work things out. And, if I think that somebody has a problem with me, I also need to make the first move. I need to reach out to see what the problem might be, and it is important, Jesus says, because it has a way of affecting our worship to God. I cannot worship acceptably if I'm sitting there thinking that somebody has a problem with me. So in both cases, we are the ones who need to go out looking for a solution.

And that is what Paul wants to happen here – however it happens, these two women need to fix this situation.

III. As we go back to our text, there is another aspect of this as we find in verse 3 that PAUL CALLS IN SPECIAL HELP – HE CALLS IN A "TRUE COMPANION" TO STEP IN AND HELP THESE TWO WOMEN WORK THROUGH THEIR ISSUES.

Remember: Paul is locked up at the moment. So, in his absence, he calls on trusted friend (a member of the congregation) to step in and help these women. We think of what Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, a little further south in Greece, in 1 Corinthians 6:5. Members of the congregation were apparently taking each other

to secular courts to solve some of their religious disputes, and Paul says, ***“I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren...?”*** The message is: Instead of letting these issues grow and fester, instead of taking these things to outsiders, find a fellow Christian with some wisdom, and let that person serve as a mediator!

It is that important! It’s like saying that there is no such thing as a private leak on a boat. If we’re on a boat out on Lake Mendota and you see a leak over by where I’m sitting, you can’t say that that’s just my problem! You cannot think to yourself, “Well, that is his leak. I don’t have time to worry about it.” Yes, it might be a little awkward at first, but if there is a leak in a boat, somebody needs to speak up!

Again, thinking back to Matthew 18: If my brother or sister sins against me, I am obligated to say something. And if they do not listen to me, I need to go find a few others who can help with that situation, one or two others who can go with me to make sure I handle things the way they need to be handled. In the same way, if I’m sitting near a leak in the boat and I don’t do anything about it even when you warn me, the people around me may need to step it up a notch and do something about it themselves. But again: There is no such thing as a private leak in a boat. And that is the idea here. If we are the ones having a conflict, we might need to call on somebody else for help. And in the same way, if we see a conflict, we might be the ones who are called upon to help. Either way, Paul’s message applies to us today: Either get help or be the help! ***“Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women....”*** The church is a family, we are working toward the same goal, and many times it is a group effort. When my brothers and sisters are fighting, it is my business to try to help make things right. We cannot ignore the conflict around us, especially when we have been called upon to help mediate.

IV. There is one final idea I’d like us to get out of this passage, and it’s more of an observation concerning this whole encounter, but what I’d like for us to notice is how POSITIVE Paul is here.

Yes, these women have an issue, but they ***“have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel.”*** These women are my ***“fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.”*** Yes, there is a problem, but these are good people. And so when it comes to conflict in the church, the lesson is: We need to remember who we are dealing with! So, he calls them out, but in the process, he reminds them who they are – you are my ***“fellow workers.”*** Your ***“names are in the book of life.”*** In other words: We have a common past (we have worked together), but we also have a future (our names are written in heaven). There is some praise, praise sandwich – in verse 1 he refers to his Christian family in Philippi as ***“my joy and crown,”*** and in verse 3 he refers to his ***“fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.”*** Paul is saying here that their personal differences are really not that significant as compared to eternity. In the big picture, whatever you two are arguing about is really not very important. It has been said that a big vision makes for a little argument. When we understand our mission as a congregation, it really helps keep some of these personality issues in perspective. What he’s saying is that as Christians, we are on the same team, we are heading in the same direction, and in the process we are not to confuse our ally with the enemy.

In one of the most recent weddings I did, I tried to emphasize that a husband and wife can almost be compared to the last two soldiers in an army, fighting off the entire world, and they fight back to back, facing in different directions, knowing that if anything gets between them, it is over. Marriage is like that sometimes – it’s the two of us against the world – fighting off influence from the in-laws, fighting off financial trouble, fighting off the demands on our time from various friends – and we are fighting to protect the marriage itself. To me, that is a beautiful picture. But we might say something similar about the Lord’s church – it’s us against

the world, and we dare not let anything trivial come between us. Otherwise, the bond is damaged and the battle is lost before we even know it. As with a marriage, if we turn and start fighting each other, it's over.

Conclusion:

So, this morning we have learned from two women in the Bible:

- We've learned that there will be conflict, even within our Christian family – the church is a perfect organization made up of imperfect people, people just like us.
- We've learned that when we have a sharp disagreement, we really need to do something about it and that we cannot just ignore it.
- We've learned that we may need to either get help or provide help to work through something.
- And finally, we've been reminded by Paul to keep it positive, to remember that we are fellow workers whose names are written in heaven.

As we close, I'd like to point out something quite sad about this passage, and that is: We don't really have a resolution here, do we? There is a conflict between these two women, they are told to fix it, but we do not have a record of what happens next. Did they fix it? I don't know. I do know, however, that these two names have been recorded in the Bible for all eternity as two women who for whatever reason were not able to get along. How embarrassing that must have been! Even if they worked it out, these two women are now known around the world as the women who had to be told by Paul to get along!

So, I would leave us with this question: What kind of legacy are we leaving? Will I be known as a person who holds a grudge and refuses to work things out, or will I be known as someone who works for peace? If I were to die this afternoon, which reputation will I be leaving behind?

And so, with that, I would close by asking: Do you personally have a problem with a Christian brother or sister? If you do, it seems to me that the path forward is quite clear. Sit down and talk about it. If the gap is so wide that you cannot even speak to each other, then pull somebody in who might be able to help you work through that. I am so thankful for the request that led to this morning's lesson, and I am especially thankful for these lessons that we have been able to learn from Euodia and Syntyche.

If you are not a Christian, we would invite you to make that decision this morning. There is a God, he is alive, he sent his Son to live a perfect life and die in our place. We accept his free offer of salvation through our obedience to the good news. We turn away from sin, we allow ourselves to be buried with Jesus in baptism, and we are raised up to start living the Christian life. If you'd like to learn more, let us know. If there's some crisis in your life we need to pray about, if there's some sin you need our encouragement to overcome, we would invite you to let us know – either right now or before you leave this morning. Whatever it is, if we can help you get closer to God in any way, we hope you will let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com