Philippians 5 – Servants of Christ

Josh 24:14-18; Phil 2:19-30; Matt 24:42-47

It's week 5 in our series on Philippians, and we're at the 2nd half of Chap 2.

We've spent some time thinking about how Jesus should be the focus of everything – so there's no hierarchy between us, but only the status we have in Christ.

And then we've spent quite a lot of time thinking about how many reasons there are to be thankful to Christ even in the midst of sufferings. Well Paul continues with that theme in this section as he speaks of the people around him.

Later on, he'll thank the Philippians for their kindness to him. But for now he wants to focus his appreciation on their messenger, Epaphroditus, and also on his own colleague Timothy.

One of the things Paul had picked up from the example of Jesus was the importance of surrounding himself with colleagues – or, as he calls them, fellow servants in the work of the gospel.

At the beginning of our series, we looked at Acts 16 when Paul journeyed from Antioch to Philippi. We saw how previously Paul had travelled with Barnabas and John Mark, but this time had Silas as his companion. And along the way he picked up Timothy & Luke.

Friendship is one of God's great blessings. It's so encouraging for us to find people who are glad to live and work alongside us. How hard it can feel in a new place, when you don't know anyone. So how much worse for Paul, when every stop in his itinerary is in a new place with new people and new challenges. How good to have Silas, Timothy and Luke along-side.

But their familiar faces are not only a comfort to Paul in unfamiliar places –they also strengthen his work. Perhaps you remember the Old Testament proverb about the greater resilience of two people – comparing it with a braided 3-strand rope.

These days, we usually talk about this as teamwork. A team working together is much more effective on a task, than the same number of people working alone. Better, more resilient, more effective, more enjoyable. Like the Upper Wylye Valley Team!!

Some of you here are military – so you will be familiar with John Adair's model of 'Effective Leadership' – that there are three things a leader needs to focus on: The Task, The Team, The Individual. Each has strengths to be developed and challenges to be met.

That was very clear at CPAS, when I led the Patronage Department, making 60 appointments a year around the country. For some of the time I was on my own – at or near breaking point.

And then I was able to recruit 3 colleagues. First I had the fun of training them – and having them shadow me at meetings. Then, once they got going, we were four separate individuals doing our own thing. But finally we managed to bind our work together – and I had to keep focusing on these three things.

1) How to keep running effective appointment processes.
2) How to keep the team functioning well together.
3) How to keep meeting the personal needs of team members who were often travelling on their own.

Interestingly we can see Paul touching on all three of these points – some 2000 years before me! Let's look at our passage from Philippians.

Both Paul and the Philippians find their ministry strengthened by colleagues. In V25, we see that the Philippians had sent Epaphroditus as their messenger to Paul with a financial gift to take care of his needs in prison. Rather than them all traipsing across to Ephesus, they could delegate the task to one of their number. Job done!

And in v19, Paul plans to send Timothy to Philippi to speak for him, to strengthen them, and to bring back encouraging news from them. Paul can't make that journey as he's in prison – but Timothy can. The task can be done even if Paul can't do it himself.

And what a delight for me to be able to read these verses with Timothy right here with us (or Tim as we call him!)

V20 *We have no one else like him, who shows genuine concern for your welfare. And you know how well Tim has proved himself!* If you only had Tim or I, then you'd be without someone to lead you more often than not. But we can send each other!

Of course we could have arranged our ministry so that Tim just looked after this end of the benefice, and I never saw you – but then there'd be times of the week when there was nobody around. So we decided instead to live up to the name of Upper Wylye Valley ***Team***, and to work together as a team - sharing responsibility for the whole benefice but taking different tasks as appropriate. As Paul found, having a

team enables Christ's work to be carried out more effectively.

But Paul also had to work on his team's coherence. You can see in V22 that Paul has developed a kind of father-son apprentice relationship with Timothy.

When I was in Indonesia, I heard a great story. One missionary managed to keep his ability in the national language well-hidden – and always worked with an interpreter. He would preach, and the interpreter would translate. After a while he'd say to the interpreter "OK, now you know the gospel message, and how to adapt it to different circumstances. So off you go and preach it on your own!"
And then he'd find a new interpreter.

This is in effect what Paul has been doing with Timothy. It's been like me having my new colleagues shadow me so that they could do the job on their own – or like having the fun of working with a curate. Train them up and send them off! That training relationship is tremendously important.

Obviously, it's very different for Tim and I, as we are both already trained and experienced. So it's much more a partnership of peers. But we still have to work on keeping our relationship strong and tight. When we first arrived, we spent hours together praying and talking through each different situation we encountered so we could speak for each other when in different churches or contexts. And even now, though it's more efficient to be in different places, it's also really important for us to work in the same place as well. Hence the delight of sharing ministry together today.

Actually, you can see that Paul's relationship with his Timothy is beginning to change. Paul now trusts Timothy enough to contemplate sending him off alone as his messenger. And in time that will develop into Timothy acting as Paul's ambassador – sent not just to take a message, but to address a developing problem. A relationship of growing trust. And if you look through Acts, you'll also see that Timothy and Silas go off on journeys together – so their team relationship is important too.

Ok. So we've thought of the Task, and we've thought of Team relationships. Now the Individual. And this is really clear in this passage. Look at Timothy. In V20 we see he has demonstrated his genuine concern for the welfare of the Philippians, and in V21 his concern for the interests of Jesus Christ above his own, and in V22 he's proved his ability and character – so his main need now is to be given the trust and space to grow as a leader. So Paul plans to send him off to Philippi.

The needs of Epaphroditus, on the other hand, are quite different. What he needs is to be back home! He needs the chance to recuperate, and to be relieved of his distress for his fellow Philippians. How encouraging to be publicly named as Paul's brother, co-worker and fellow-soldier. But he also needs to be embraced by the joy and honour of his own friends and congregation. So Paul sends him home.

And Tim and I have our own individual needs, too, which we both have to keep in mind. Tim is such an encouragement to me in my ministry here – and I value praying with him immensely. And sometimes he speaks up for me, when it's awkward for me to do so. So thank you, Tim, my brother and co-worker and fellow soldier!

Well – I've shown you the relevance of all of this to the team that Tim and I have formed here. But of course it spreads outwards to the ministry team around us – and I'm so grateful that we share ministry with **Jonathan** and **Katharine** and **Barbara** – who each bring their own gifts and energies.

And with the team of worship leaders who meet regularly with us - **Vincie** and **Henry** and **David** and **Steve** and **Gill** and **Richard** and **John**.
And our Team officers – **Graham, Simon** and **Kim**.
And the team of **Church Wardens** and parish reps who meet with us from time to time. And the music team – choir and organists…
And of course each village has its own **PCC team** who need to be thinking about their own context – task, team and individual needs. I'm praying that the Vision renewal process which we are initiating on Saturday will give us a chance to focus on each of those.

But in the end, Paul's team, and his team-members don't belong to him. Paul relates each of the four individual and groups of people he's talking about directly back to their Lord.
V19 – **Paul** hopes ***in the Lord Jesus*** to send Timothy;
V21 **Timothy** looks out for ***the interests of Jesus Christ***;
V29 **the Philippians** should welcome their friend ***in the Lord*** with great joy; because **Epaphroditus** almost died ***for the work of Christ.***
We can't build a team for Christ, unless we are also each committed to Christ.

And this is what is reinforced by our two other readings. Look at our first one. It begins: ***Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness.***
And do you see in V15 how Joshua can draw on the core of his family's resolve: ***As for me and my family, we will serve the Lord!*** That was particularly

significant to me out in Indonesia. Indeed this verse, which a friend had embroidered for us, hung inside our front door as a declaration to all who entered. ***As for me and my family, we will serve the Lord!***

But of course Joshua also wants to be in team fellowship with the Israelites he leads – and this can only happen if like him and his family, they too will serve the Lord. God has rescued them from slavery, has performed miracles for them, has protected them through hard times, and brought them to their place of safety and flourishing. So they declare in v18 ***"We too will serve the Lord, because he is our God."***

Do you want to be part of, and building up a good ministry team in your church? Well, remember the tasks you have to do for Jesus, the health of the team fellowship you are part of, and the individual needs of those around you. But above all remember the one for whom you are doing it.

As Jesus observes in our Gospel reading v45: *'Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? **46** It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns*.

Shall we pray?