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SERMON TITLE: This is Your City
SCRIPTURE: Psalm 121
DATE February 19, 2023

Online service at www.fpcd.org/live

Read also *Philippians 2:12-16, 4:1*

As you prepare for a new day, it is good not only to remember where you have been, but also where you are going.

Paul loved the Philippian church. He was probably closer to this church than any of the others. Maybe they were nicer, like First Presbyterian Church. This was a multi-ethnic church with Jews and Greeks and Romans; the religious and the pagans.

Paul was away from them but not disconnected. He wanted them to carry on successfully. He knew their weaknesses but he also understood that God was at work through them—and had been for some time! He reminded them of that, and then he admonished them in how to keep the faith.

No complaining, he said. No arguing. Live clean, innocent, godly lives so that you shine like stars in a crooked culture.

Their members included

1. Lydia, a Jewish businesswoman who founded the church with a prayer ministry. She had the gift of hospitality.
2. There was the Gentile prison warden. He might have been Police Chief of Philippi and it's possible that after his conversion, he worked to establish justice for people who were illegally imprisoned.
3. The Gentile slave girl who was trafficked because of her demonic behavior was healed by Paul. She might have used her experience to start a healing ministry.
4. Clement was a leader of the church, a Roman. He was very possibly one of the original prosperous colonists who settled Philippi. Paul called him a "true yokefellow." He is thought to have become Clement of Rome, a pastor who wrote The First Epistle of Clement to the church at Corinth.
5. Paul praised two Greek women, Euodia and Syntyche for their commitment to the ministry. He points out that they had a pretty serious disagreement. It must have affected the whole church for him to publicly urge them to drop the hostility and get along.
6. There was an unnamed peacemaker who helped them forgive each other and reconcile.
7. Luke the physician who traveled with Paul stayed in Philippi to help the church become established.
8. Paul sent a young minister-in-training named Timothy to preach there. He was mixed race—Jewish mother, Greek father.
9. There was a man over stewardship, Epaphroditus, who delivered financial support from Philippi Church to Paul more than once.

These ten people—Jews, Greeks, and Romans were a few of the leaders in this very early Christian church. This was a church which was involved in the life of their city. It was a public faith. It was a giving church which helped finance the spread of the gospel.

If I was to design a perfect church, a church with a vision like the Philippian church – one whose mission statement is something like "Connecting with God and sharing the good news with the community," it would be one like this one, where diverse people come together, work in tandem, grow together in faith, and reach out to the city. At monthly potlucks they share their casseroles, which are always delicious. They are a church where the roof never leaks, and no one complains about the pastor or the music. 😊

I said it was the perfect church!

However, we know equipment grows old, the roof leaks, the ac breaks, people fail, pastors preach messages that step on your toes, congregants disagree, the community doesn't always appreciate you, and it has been happening since Jesus rose from the dead.

Life brings its challenges! In the past fifteen years most of us have had experiences where it just seems that life takes a dramatic turn for the worse. The loss seems great and success small. And then the pastor retires. 😞

But look what you have done and how you have lived. It is something to be proud of:

- You study the Bible in small groups and Sunday School lessons; teaching each other and the children faithfully;
- You have been committed to our kids and youth;
- You pray—and have a prayer ministry; you reach out to the parents and kids across the street;
- You give, here, to local ministries, and missionaries around the world;
- You make sandwiches faithfully—probably 125,000 of them;
- You sing beautifully—and invite many people in the community to join us, even being invited and going to Carnegie Hall;
- You are diverse, and do not get discouraged when differences arise—you strive to work them out to a win-win. This is the place where that happens.
- You have the courage to tell Bible stories in the worship services here; and
- You are Bible storytellers to your community, and continue to hold public Festivals in the Park; at Duncanville High School, at other churches, having included 10-12 Churches Working Together (a miracle);

- You have held Community Conversations for significant community leaders;
- You felt comfortable doing this because you have had Conversations with God right here;
- You have prayed for lost children and they have been found. You have gone out to find them yourself.
- You have hired marvelous youth pastors who have gone on to become full pastors leading churches.
- You have an excellent livestream and internet ministry.
- You are the David against the Goliath of a culture who has lost their faith and has little trust nor respect for Christians and the church. Only you did not kill Goliath—you have turned Goliath's head toward God.

Don't complain; don't argue when you are looking for a new pastor. Don't make excuses or back down or be afraid. The Bible does not allow that attitude! It says 365 times, "FEAR NOT!" How many days in a year? 😊

All you have done has been overseen by the Lord who has lifted you up. God is not done with First Presbyterian Church Duncanville. God has just begun. You will have a wonderful new pastor to train, just like you trained me—because you are leaders; you are disciples of Jesus Christ. He is faithful and HE LOVES YOU ALL.

Let's look forward for a minute. You have a mountain before you. READ Psalm 121:

I look up to the mountains -- does my help come from there? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth! He will not let you stumble; the one who watches over you will not slumber. Indeed, he who watches over Israel never slumbers or sleeps. The LORD himself watches over you! The LORD stands beside you as your protective shade. The sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon at night. The LORD keeps you from all harm and watches over your life. The LORD keeps watch over you as you come and go, both now and forever.

Mountains are beautiful. But the mountain scene evident to the Psalmist is one on which an army infiltrates them. The army is rolling down toward you. Within that threat is loss, not having the know-how to move forward, human strength, problems, lacks, and limitations. Looking at ourselves, we come up short. The Lord says: it is not a warhorse; it is not the best equipped army; it is not human strength. We might add in our day: it is not a top education or job or riches or most desirable city which makes life have purpose, or 200 people in your church.

Your help does not come from those things.

Your help comes from the LORD, the Creator, who watches over you 24-7. The LORD never sleeps or gets bored with you. The LORD stands beside you in the Texas heat. The LORD protects you from Texas storms. In the midst of hardship and even death you are not harmed because you are on a journey of hope with God, and you've got each other. You are learning and getting stronger as you go.

Therefore, moving forward . . . do not be afraid. Instead,

Be a Lydia in your prayer ministry to the community and in hospitality. Be the prison warden who renders aid and support to those who are falsely accused. If you are like the slave girl who was set free from bondage, helps others become free. Support your young ministers-in-training like Timothy, and that goes for all your young staff and pastors desiring to serve. Continue to seek out whom you can support and look for the Clements who are our future theologians. Love the many children here and be like a child yourself, with the Lord. Continue to grow in diversity and get along with one another, unlike Euodia and Syntyche. **Your diversity is your richness.**

Always sing! Always tell Bible stories in the public square, and you will find that The Lord will be with you and keep you and watch over your life as you come and go, both now and forever,

AMEN