

Strive Together**Philippians 3:4b-14****Sunday, October 18, 2020****Beargrass Christian Church****I. INTRODUCTION.**

- A. Not that I am counting, but I have 13 days before retirement.
 - 1. One of my challenges has been moving stuff around.
 - 2. There is a ripple effect to all of it—I have to throw out things at home to make room for things from my office.
- B. I appreciate this story from a friend who had a similar experience.
 - 1. He said: “In the past my life was simple—I had a formula.
 - a. “Take care of what you have until it is broken or useless—and then store it in the basement or garage.
 - b. “Then I got married and the formula changed.
 - c. “Take care of what you have and when it is broken, used up, or of no value, then throw it away.
 - 2. “So, in my opinion, I began to throw away what was useless.
 - a. “There were boxes, the bottoms of which had rotted out.
 - b. “There was some bad birdseed—at least I assumed it was bad.
 - c. “I planted some of it three times and no birds ever came up.
 - 3. “This is a common drama in everyone’s home.
 - a. “Things get used up—that is why we have garbage dumps.
 - b. “Things get broken, lose value, and have to be disposed of.
 - 4. “But once in a while, just once in a while, there is a case of somebody throwing away that which is very valuable.
 - a. “Something very good and very right gets tossed.
 - b. “You can think of such times—they do not occur very often.
 - 5. “Suppose a man in a very nice suit sees a child drowning.
 - a. “He can’t swim with all that on, so he tosses it aside.
 - b. “It was still good—but compared to the life of the child?
 - 6. “Imagine pioneers trying to get to California and Oregon.
 - a. “They come to the Rocky Mountains and the snow is beginning to fall and those wagons are heavy.
 - b. “The leader says, ‘We have to unburden the wagons.’
 - c. “The children are crying; the parents are crying.
 - d. “But over into the rocks and into the ravine go furniture, chests filled with precious things, a piano.
 - e. “The group cannot go on if they hold on to these things.
 - 7. “Even the Bible has stories about ships tossed by storms or hanging onto a sandbar that had to let go of cargo—or people!
 - a. “Precious cargo, good cargo, fine clothes, jewelry, furniture, all kinds of good things tossed away.
 - b. “It becomes a matter of life and death.
 - c. “In view of the crisis, even that which is good has to go.”
- C. We have seen story after tragic story in the news.
 - 1. The West is on fire—the Southeast is under water.

2. Our hearts go out to so many who had to let go of so much in order to try to save their lives and the lives of their loved ones.
3. A magazine article described what some folks took with them.
 - a. Iona said: "I made sure to hold on to my late husband's picture ID—I carry this with me at all times."
 - b. Danny, 10, said: "I kept my football; I want to play quarterback for the Saints someday."
 - c. Chantel, 28, said: "I salvaged a few photos of my family," which she describes as "her memories."
 - d. And Christopher, 22, hung on to his Bible, saying, "Where else are you going to turn in a time like this?"

D. Faced with a similar situation, what would it be for you?

E. What one thing would you keep?

II. **TODAY WE CONTINUE TO FLIP THROUGH PHILIPPIANS.**

A. We are in the midst of a four-part sermon series called "Together."

1. We have heard Paul urge us to stand together and serve together.
2. Today's message is "Strive Together."
3. The word doesn't pop up very often in the Bible or in our hymnal, but it does show up in this letter from Paul.

B. In the 3rd chapter Paul refers to his resume—and it is impressive!

1. He says, "If anyone has a reason to boast, I have more!"
2. (What happened to that humility message in chapter two?)
3. And yet, we have to consider the context.
 - a. He has found something much better and more valuable.
 - b. He describes his "before and after" life.
 - c. He has let go of his "saved by the law" mindset and discovered the immeasurable mercy and love of God.
4. He says, "If I entered a bragging contest, I would win."
 - a. "Not for what I have—I'm not wealthy—in fact, I'm in jail.
 - b. "But I would win because of who I am.
 - c. "My identity, my family tree, my connections, my status—I don't know a soul who can match my achievements.
 - d. "But I consider all of that to be garbage now!"
 - e. The Greek word is stronger—poop, dung—you get the idea.
 - f. He says: "I've tossed it—I have dumped it in the dump."
5. But why would Paul let go of what he has just called good?
 - a. Because he believes that Jesus emptied himself, became human, and was obedient unto death, even death on the cross.
 - b. He believes that this is what Jesus is about.
 - c. Discipleship is not upward mobility, but downward humility.
 - d. Paul believes that followers should be like Jesus.
 - e. And he believes that this is the most important thing in his life—this is the purpose that drives him now.

III. **SO, WHAT DRIVES US—FOR WHAT WILL WE STRIVE?**

A. I had an interesting revelation as I was cleaning out my stuff.

1. I came across my Doctor of Ministry certificate.
 - a. I meant to hang it up on the wall in May of 1999.

- b. It was to join some others—the undergraduate and Master of Divinity degree certificates, the Theta Phi certificate, the ordination certificate, the ministerial code of ethics.
- c. But it never made it—it never went on display.
- d. When I arrived here in 1997, we hit the ground running.
- e. It was inspiring to be in ministry and mission with so many faithful folks—letters before my name didn't matter as much.
- f. There were more important things to do and to celebrate.
- 2. So, I set aside some space for a “Grace and Gratitude” drawer.
- 3. It includes notes, pictures, and messages from the church family about our shared ministry together—it is my “keeper” drawer.
- 4. And I will continue to give thanks for all of you.
- 5. And I will continue to be grateful for those who have gone before who endured such incredible challenges...
- 6. As well as those who will keep the vision and mission alive!
- B. For instance, we recently celebrated the life of Helen Cox.
 - 1. Her long life helped us gain a helpful perspective about now.
 - 2. Born in 1920, her life literally spanned two global pandemics.
 - a. A couple of years before she was born World War I ended—and over 20 million people perished in that war.
 - b. Then the Spanish Flu pandemic spread like wildfire—around 50 million people on the planet passed away.
 - 3. When she was 9, the Great Depression began.
 - a. Unemployment hit 25% and the World GDP dropped 27%.
 - b. The country nearly collapsed, along with the world economy.
 - c. Still a teenager at 19, World War II started.
 - d. At 21, the United States was fully engaged in World War II.
 - e. Between the age of 19 and 25, 75 million people perished.
 - 4. Then smallpox ran rampant during her 20s and eventually killed 300 million people during her lifetime.
 - 5. From her birth until she was 35, she dealt with the fear of polio epidemics each summer.
 - 6. At 30, the Korean War started and 5 million were lost.
 - a. The Vietnam War began and lasted for 20 years.
 - b. During the Cold War, she lived with the nuclear threat.
 - c. At 42 there was the Cuban Missile Crisis, a tipping point.
 - d. Life on our planet as we know it could have ended.
 - 7. And the list goes on—and we are not even halfway through...
 - 8. Think about what has happened in the past 50 years—and what happened in our country before she was born.
 - 9. How did Helen and so many other people endure all of that?
- C. Now, think about this church...this congregation...
 - 1. Our birthday as Baptists was in 1784.
 - a. We became part of the Disciples movement in 1842.
 - b. We survived the Civil War—and we were in the thick of it!
 - 2. Some are concerned about our future.
 - a. Are we ever going to recover from COVID?

- b. Will there ever be an end to these quaran-times?
 - c. But we can find great hope from the lessons of the past.
 - d. In their striving and surviving, people got us to this point.
3. It is our turn to carry the torch from here...together.
- D. I appreciate these words from one in the midst of a crisis.
- 1. "As danger and death danced around, we became one color.
 - 2. "As we carried each other to safety, we became one class.
 - 3. "As we lit candles of hope, we became one generation.
 - 4. "As front-liners risked their lives, we became one gender.
 - 5. "As we prayed for strength, we became one faith.
 - 6. "As we said words of encouragement, we spoke one language.
 - 7. "As we gave our blood, sweat and tears, we became one body.
 - 8. "As we mourned the great losses, we became one family.
 - 9. As we recall the sacrifices of heroes, we become one people."
- E. So, what about us—what goes—and what will we keep?
- 1. What are we going to do with our pride?
 - 2. What will we do with our agenda and independence?
 - 3. What will we do with our time and resources?
 - 4. What will we do with our own resumes?
 - 5. Paul urges us to let them go...and become more like Jesus.
 - 6. And he would remind us again...that we are in this...together!
- F. Did we in our own strength confide?
- 1. Our striving would be losing.
 - 2. But there is one who takes our side, one of God's own choosing.
 - 3. You ask who that may be?
 - 4. Christ Jesus, it is he.
 - 5. With mighty power to save, victorious o'er the grave.
 - 6. Christ will prevail triumphant!
 - 7. And God's reign endures forever!