

Philippians 3:4b-14

One of the hardest things to do on this earth is to choose what matters. Most people know the difference between right and wrong, but find the difficulty in choosing what matters. As a parent, I find myself saying far too often these words, "What were you thinking?" or "Where was your brain?" I say this because I sometimes see my children not choosing the things that matter! They want to argue and fight, and it escalates from the pettiest of circumstances. For instance, our two year old virtually goes ballistic if he does not get his peppermint lifesaver before heading out to pick up his brother from the bus stop. He will choose to throw his juice cup on the ground as though this will help him get the lifesaver! What kind of a choice is that?

And when I was in my twenties, boy did I have problems choosing what matters. I would wander from choice to choice about which career I would enter into. My total focus was on salary and never did I even think about choosing a profession that I loved or one that mattered. "Where was my brain," When choosing a major in college? Not on finding work I enjoyed or was passionate about. No those late teen years were about choosing what makes me feel good without any concern about what really mattered. Have you ever thought about what really matters?

This is the question that Paul is raising up to the congregation of Christians in Philippi. Paul writes from a prison and addresses the concerns that they have for him. Keep praying but don't worry too much about me, Paul says, because I am still carrying God's message to the people, even in prison. Paul makes that difficult decision to choose what matters and his comfort, even his very freedom, is not what *really* matters. Proclaiming Jesus Christ and him crucified is what really matters to Paul.

Prison may not be a concern for Paul but he does have distress for what is going on in the church at Philippi. The people in that assembly are beginning to quarrel amongst each other. There is growing dissention and argument. There are some that are following a different teaching than Paul's. This matters to Paul because he has had this happen before. Paul started a congregation in northern Antioch in Galatia. Upon his departure from them others came in and told the assembly there that Paul's message about Christ Jesus was incomplete. Men were coming to say that to be a "real" Christian you must be circumcised and follow other rituals of cleanliness. These men were very believable in their false teaching and the people of Antioch thought that they had a point and followed them. They said, "Why wouldn't God want us to show this outward appearance marking us as true believers?" What had already happened in Antioch was beginning to happen again in Philippi.

Paul reminds the Philippians that they rejoice in the Lord and boast in Christ Jesus, not because of these marks in the flesh or blindly following rules, but because Jesus Christ chose what mattered. You too can choose what matters church in Philippi!

Paul said, "Look! If I truly believed that God wanted this from believers I would have taught it!" Paul's credentials were as close to perfection as possible. He said, "I am the poster child of outward perfection. He was circumcised on the eighth day, a card carrying man from the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, cleaned by the Law and made right with God by following the Law. I even persecuted the Christian church. Paul says all of these choices do not matter. They give people no benefit in God's eyes. They actually turn us away from God's love. Paul once believed them to be assets for faith, just like the men are teaching the church at Philippi. But in fact they are no assets; they are all "skybulon."

If we understood ancient Greek we would all gasp at Paul saying this. He is so passionate about his testimony, the life story of how Jesus Christ has transformed Paul to Gospel witness that he writes about the things that used to matter so dearly to him as now being "skybulon." The word is translated as "refuse" in our text, but it is much more raw and street slang than that. *Skybulon* is one of those words that we try not to say in church, and in front of children. It is the street word for animal feces. Like the bumper sticker, "Skybulon Happens". You get the picture.

Paul says that none of it matters. Those once believed assets to faith make Jesus Christ's death and resurrection secondary. We end up making that sacrifice not matter. So what does matter? How do we make choices that matter?

First and foremost, choosing things that matter is rarely easy. Choosing what matters is one of the most difficult things to do on earth. God makes claims on our heart. God does this through the actions of Jesus Christ and movement of the Holy Spirit. Paul is so passionate about his testimony and his encounter with the resurrected Christ that he cannot hold back his tongue. This brilliant theologian slips into street language. Shouldn't we be so passionate for sharing the good news, not only in our language but in our actions?

This passion was found by the actions of a man by the name of Dick Hoyt. He and his wife Judy made a decision to bring their son home and give him the best life they could. Their son, Rick, had a tragedy at birth that left their child unable to walk or talk. He could not play catch with his dad. Dick and Judy made a choice that mattered by enrolling Rick in public school where he learned to write his thoughts using a special computer. When Rick turned 15 he heard about a five mile race and asked his father to run in the race with him. Dick was not a runner, but agreed to push his son in a wheel chair because it mattered to his son. After the race was finished Rick communicated to his father that this day was the first time he did not feel physically handicapped.

Dick made the choice to give Rick more of that feeling and together since then, they have run marathons, competed in triathlons, and trekked across the country-3,770 miles. Rick *could* not run without his father and Dick *would* not run without

his son. Choosing what matters is the most difficult thing to do on this earth, but it is exactly what matters most. Choosing what matters has repercussions beyond our knowing. This is the race that Paul tells the Philippians to strain toward, and our hearts tells us to also press on, together, forgetting what lies behind, and be passionate about what God calls us to choose today. For you are made right with God through Jesus Christ. You are free to strive and run the race and choose what matters.

Amen