

**GRASPING FOR MUCH-NEEDED GRACE:
20 Days of Nonpartisan Prayer in a Polarized Political Season
Vermont Conference (UCC) prayer initiative
Fall 2020**

Scripture Focus: Philippians 4: 4-7 NRSV

by Ted Marcy

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (New Revised Standard Version--NRSV)

Reflection

When Paul wrote this letter to the community at Philippi, he was imprisoned, possibly in Ephesus, under a threatened death sentence. Before this, as Paul recounts in 2 Corinthians 11, he had 40 lashes five times, he was beaten three times with rods, stoned once, and shipwrecked at least three times. His pastoral leadership and financial management had been severely questioned by a church that he had founded (at Corinth). And yet, despite all of these experiences of physical and mental anguish, he could write this remarkable message of the surpassing strength of God's peaceful presence.

We are within a global pandemic, experiencing economic distress, facing a fraught election, and with fears of a constitutional crisis. We may feel afflicted, persecuted, perplexed and knocked down. But we are not abandoned by the God who in human form forgave his executioners on the cross, and who overcame death.

In this letter, Paul also tells us to be like Christ; to love our enemies, and to pray for them. We are not to hold others in contempt. Contempt never wins an argument, usually the opposite, and is bad both for the target of our contempt and us. We should see those on the other side of the political spectrum as children of God like ourselves. We are to listen respectfully and to attempt to

understand their point of view before offering our own. This is not easy, but we have a contemporary model – the friendship of Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Antonin Scalia.

Prayer

Creating, Redeeming and Sustaining God, we are mindful of the real sources of stress in our lives and the lives of those near and far, known and unknown. May your inspired word, written by real people in times and places even more challenging than ours guide us. Help us to follow Paul and to pray with thanksgiving confident in God's surpassing peace. And help us to follow the model of Jesus in loving those with whom we disagree. AMEN

Ted Marcy is a retired pulmonologist as well as a clergy spouse. He and his wife, Rev. Kim Hornung-Marcy, have become active participants at Williston Federated Church in Williston, VT since Kim retired as pastor of North Ferrisburgh United Methodist Church earlier this year.