

May 6, 2018

“A Cross-Shaped Life: Who Will Hear?” © – Rev. Seth D. Jones

Scripture: Philippians 1:1-18

The Spirit compels me (I am compelled...) to write a letter to the church of Rockland...So few letters are written these days. That is weird to me, given that letters have been written for almost 2500 years.

But, I guess when Paul was writing letters, only people who could write and read wrote letters. All the letters had to be read out loud. So, if I just write it and send it, maybe someone will read it out loud. How to begin...

*To all the saints who are in Rockland Congregational Church, with the leaders and helpers, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Whenever I pray, I remember to be grateful for each of you. In quiet ways and in present ways, so many of you try to make the Gospel present for one another, and in this I take joy. I am not by nature a joyful person, and so when joy is present, I notice it, and in the presence of the Holy Spirit, I have found it here, with you, on numerous occasions.*

*My confidence in your Gospel work comes for the source of that Gospel, Jesus Christ, who is also the one who will complete the work for all of us.*

*I believe it is right to think this way because you pray for me, just as I do you, and in doing so, we hold one another close and share in God's grace together in our fellowship in this faith of which God has chosen us.*

*One of the deepest sensibilities of our faith is longing, and I believe we long together for renewal of faith and the presence of all the saints among us,*

*to know deeply the words of Hebrews,*

*“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses...let us look to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith..”*

*And so my prayer is that our love may overflow more and more with knowledge, clarity, good will, and hope for this world and those who live within it, so that when we meet once again with Christ, we will share in the glow and peace and healing of the first light of creation, having shared the love of God with one another and even our enemies in the glory and praise of God.*

*Our church has helped spread the Gospel in Rockland and has become known in the community as a gathering place for people, and as a presence of possibility for those in need – in our representation with the homeless coalition, at AIO, and through our Discretionary Fund.*

*My hope is that these ways of making God's love present in the community and the world*

*gives you some confidence to speak of your faith without fear and with a trust that the Lord will bless your work and your words with the touch and presence of the Holy Spirit.*

*I believe when we reflect upon these works of love that flow first from God to us, we are formed more deeply into followers of Jesus.*

*Many speak of the faith from a place of power, and use that platform of power to pretend they are suffering for Christ, even as money flows to them, and, as we know, money is power in this day and age. Others adopt spiritual ways for political means, using the faith for personal gain. This has always happened and will always happen. These ways only matter to us in this way: Christ is either needed or is proclaimed in any given relationship and situation. Our question should always be whether Christ is needed or if Christ needs to be pointed out, proclaimed, not in some overt way, but in ways that continually show others that God is always drawing all of Creation into God's embrace.*

*For us, for we who gather at Rockland Congregational Church, let us rejoice in the process that lets our lives take the form of the Cross; that a Cross-Shaped Life begins to appear within our fellowship together. I believe a Cross-Shaped Life begins where it begins for Jesus – not in power, or politics, or in personal gain, but instead that life begins in the griefs, the losses, the diminishment in health and person we suffer in our daily lives and relationships.*

*Like Jesus, we must go through these trials to get to the Resurrection. And it is there, on the shores where we break bread with the disciples and with Christ, that joy is present. Joy is never at the expense of loss, grief, and suffering, but because of and with loss, grief, and suffering.*

*This joyful fellowship does not happen with institutions that promote a particular perspective on faith, or with groups of people who believe similar things.*

*No, a Cross-Shaped life forms when a person approaches another person.*

*We don't change the World. But the world changes when we change a person's world by being the presence of Christ, God's love, with another's suffering, loss, grief, diminished hopes, and personal struggles. In this, Christ is proclaimed, and it is in this that I rejoice. I pray we may all continue to rejoice in the ways of the Lord by way of Jesus' Cross and Resurrection.*

*Amen*