

# Immanuel Lutheran Mail Ministry



**Philippians 1:27-2:4** <sup>27</sup> Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, <sup>28</sup> and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. <sup>29</sup> For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, <sup>30</sup> engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have. <sup>1</sup> So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, <sup>2</sup> complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. <sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

In the Name of Jesus Christ, Whose sacrificial death unites us Christians, Dear Fellow Redeemed, “All for One and One for All!”—Can you tell me whose motto that was? If you said The Three Musketeers, you’re right. In 1844, French author Alexandre Dumas wrote the now famous novel about the friendship of three reckless young men. One common thread ran through their many outlandish exploits—and that was the warm bond of companionship. They were friends, comrades, companions. They did everything together. When one had a success, the others shared in the profits. When one was in danger, the others rushed to his aid. That’s why their motto was ALL FOR ONE AND ONE FOR ALL.

It’s an attractive picture, isn’t it—that picture of close companionship? Perhaps it brings to mind your own youth, the friends you had, and the companionship you enjoyed. Do you sometimes feel lonely and isolated these days? I’m sure you’re not alone; many have been feeling that way the past several months. Well, would you like to enjoy such close companionship again? You can, you know. In fact, as our text for today shows, it is *God’s will* for your life that you do enjoy such companionship, and in fact, He provides it. That’s why God placed you into this Christian congregation. Join me today in considering the theme:

## “ALL FOR ONE AND ONE FOR ALL”

- I. Christians are companions in faith.
- II. Christians are companions in suffering.
- III. Christians are companions in love.

The Apostle Paul was writing to the Christian at Philippi, a large city in northern Greece. Big as the city was, this was a small group of Christians, probably a bit smaller than our group here. Though small, he was very pleased with their progress. Under Paul’s care and God’s, they had made a fine beginning as a close-knit group of believers. And yet Paul admonishes them, **“let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.”**

You know, the Apostle’s talking to us, too. What does that mean, that our lives should be **“worthy of the Gospel”**?—Simply that our everyday life should reflect honor and glory on the good news of Christ crucified for sinners. In our text Paul warns the Philippians not to rest on their laurels, but to “walk the walk”—to keep on making sure that their deeds matched their words, and that their lifestyle matched

the Gospel they said they believed in. And it can't just be a few people who do it, either; it's got to be everybody. For a Christian congregation to be successful, it has to be ALL FOR ONE AND ONE FOR ALL.

First of all, **Christians are companions in faith.** At the time he wrote this letter, Paul was in Rome, under arrest for professing the Christian faith. He hoped to be released so that he could travel to Philippi, but in any case, Paul said, ***“Whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.”***

In Greek, ***“striving side by side”*** is one word. It's a term originally used in ancient athletic games, when one team of athletes would compete against another. I know it's been quite some time since we were able to enjoy watching sports on tv, but we all know that when it comes to athletics, striving together is important. After all, it's the best *team* that usually wins. But do you know where unity and teamwork is even more important than in athletics? It's in the Christian congregation. Why? Because the thing we're defending is so very precious. You see, we on this team aren't defending an end zone, or a basket, or a hockey net. We're not working together for a gold medal and a few moments of glory. We are striving together to defend *the faith of the Gospel*. The pure truths of God's Word, not adulterated by any man-made ideas—that is the prize we're struggling to preserve. It's the very Gospel of salvation. It's the Good News that just by trusting in Jesus, any sinner can be pardoned and go to heaven. The final trophy—the crown of righteousness which the almighty Judge will give to us because of the atonement of His Son.

Because that faith is so very precious, that's why we've got to stick together in this congregation. It has to be ALL FOR ONE AND ONE FOR ALL. Take a look at the people sitting around you today—these people, Paul says, are your companions in the faith. That's not just a privilege, that's a pretty big responsibility, when you think about it. For instance, when a church member forsakes a certain part of God's Word that he doesn't happen to like, he's not just sinning against the Lord—he's betraying his companions. He has given up striving for the Gospel. When a church member consistently refuses to attend worship services, he's not just harming his own spiritual life—he's abandoning his companions. He's saying to them, ***“You go on struggling, but I'm not going to help. I won't be there to encourage you with my presence and to help shoulder the Lord's work.”*** It sort of makes you shudder when you look at it that way, doesn't it! How often have we looked at our participation in the congregation through the lense of “myself first.” May the Lord preserve us from selfishly abandoning our companions in the faith!

Paul goes on in our text to show another reason why our congregation's motto must be ALL FOR ONE AND ONE FOR ALL: because we come up against such powerful opposition in this world. Our text says, ***“standing firm in one spirit, . . . and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.”*** Why is congregational unity so important? Because **Christians are companions in suffering.**

And believe me, as a Christian you've got adversaries who are going to try and make you suffer. I don't think Paul is primarily talking about unbelievers here, either, though their sneers are hard enough to take. No, our congregation, like the one in Philippi, is much more threatened by adversaries who themselves profess to be Christians. It's no secret that various church goers in our community have criticized us and will continue to criticize us for our firm stance on God's Word. For instance, God's Word tells us that even if a person is a fellow Christian, yet they promote teaching that is contrary to the sound doctrine of Scripture, we are to avoid them—not worship with them, not pray with them,

but avoid them, God says. (Rom. 16:17-18) Many Christians don't like that, calling that unloving and judgmental; but it's not that we don't love them, it's we love God and want to follow His will. And there are other clear teachings from God's Word that many deem unacceptable and ridiculous today, like the teaching from God that women are not to have authority over men in the church (1 Tim. 2:11); or that marriage is to be between one man and one woman for life (Genesis 2:24); or that God created the world in 6 days simply by the speaking of His Word. (Genesis 1)

These are the types of beliefs that will draw us a lot of ire; many people just hate conservative Lutherans like us simply because we stick with the Word of God. Does that surprise you? It shouldn't. Our Lord Jesus Himself said, ***"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."*** (Matthew 5:11-12)

Don't be frightened by them, Paul says. Don't shy back like a startled horse every time someone attacks you for your faith. My question has always been this: why should I be ashamed for sticking to what the Bible says? Let *them* be ashamed who have abandoned the Word of God and abused the precious doctrines of Scripture. Sure, it's hard sometimes. But as someone once said, a Christian is like a tea bag: not much good until he's gone through some hot water. The Bible says, ***"We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."*** (Acts 14:22)

And remember, my friend, that you are not alone in the struggle. The Philippians had seen the Apostle Paul arrested with their own eyes. They saw him thrown into prison and his feet put in stocks. Paul and Silas had been severely beaten before eventually being released. And now the persecution was widening to include other members of the congregation. But Paul says, hang in there, ***"not frightened in anything by your opponents. ... For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have."*** I've been through what you're going through, Paul says. We're in this together, ALL FOR ONE AND ONE FOR ALL!

When you suffer for Jesus' sake, remember: you too have companions—they're sitting all around you this morning. And your companions are not only in this congregation, but in every CLC church across the nation. We all stand perfectly united in the pure truths of Scripture. We need to stick together. When that criticism starts pouring in, it's got to be ALL FOR ONE AND ONE FOR ALL! Together, not giving up an inch on God's Word.

Well, Paul has spoken of the importance of standing united to fight the enemies outside our fellowship. Now he turns to an equally important topic. We need to be united in showing love toward those who are inside our fellowship. ***So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.*** Christians are companions in faith and companions in suffering. But most of all, **Christians are companions in love.**

During W.W.II, the Japanese conducted experiments to discover what form of torture was most effective in breaking down a human being, in eliciting secret information, etc. You know what they found out? *Solitary confinement* is the worst thing you can do to a person. Isolate a person from the love and fellowship of other human beings long enough, and he'll give in to anything, he'll do whatever you tell him. You know, that's the devil's strategy, too. And that's why the Lord has placed you into this Christian congregation. David says, ***"A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, Is God in His holy***

**habitation. God sets the solitary in families.”** (Psalm 68:5-6) I know that there are members of this congregation that do not have much family left to speak of, but you have us. God set you here so that you would not be alone; so that you would have a source of love and support in your Christian companions! In this congregation, it’s ALL FOR ONE AND ONE FOR ALL.

Sometimes we do sinfully allow ourselves to be split on unimportant issues. We do become divided against each other. But here’s an important issue: you have members of this congregation that need you. That need your encouragement. That need your phone call. That need you to encourage them to come back to church. That need you to defend their health. Simply put, they need your love. We don’t need any divisions. Paul says, **“complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.**

Is that easy? Not always. **“Count others more significant than yourself”**—that’s a tall order. That’s something that doesn’t come naturally, even to Christians. But the Bible tells us what will make it easier: think about what Jesus did for you. The writer to the Hebrews said, **“Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame.”** (Hebrews 12:1-2)

Really that phrase, ONE FOR ALL—that fits Jesus best of all, doesn’t it? The Bible says, **“Through the one Man, the many shall be made righteous.”** (Romans 5:19) Jesus Christ was lowly. Far from putting Himself first, Jesus put your interests before His own. He esteemed you better than himself—that’s why He submitted Himself to the shame and the agony of crucifixion. Jesus is your “soul’s best friend”—He’s your best companion in love. And He teaches you best how to be of one mind with these other companions of yours! **“In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”** (1 John 4:10-11)

Yesterday was Independence Day, and I’m sure we all took at least a little bit of time to think about the freedom which we’ve been afforded in our country for the past 244 years. When the founding fathers were signing the Declaration of Independence that 4<sup>th</sup> of July, they knew that unity was essential to the survival of their young nation. They were, after all opposing the most powerful government on earth—the British Empire. Ben Franklin said: **“Gentlemen, we must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately!”** The same may be said for us members of this congregation. Our enemies are strong. But when we stand united, there is nothing that can defeat us, for we stand with the crucified and risen Lord! May we members of Immanuel Lutheran Church be companions in faith, companions in suffering, and companions in love. Let our motto truly be: ALL FOR ONE AND ONE FOR ALL. Amen.

**And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.** (Philippians 4:7)