“People”

The Apostle Paul is ending a letter he has written to his young coworker Timothy. He includes some practical instructions and reminders: “When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments” (2 Timothy 4:13). Also, in this closing part of the letter we get a glimpse at some of the *people* who were part of Paul’s life – both friends and foes!

*People.* Isn’t there something about our human nature that makes us have this fascination with people – their lives and personalities. *People* magazine – and other magazines and tabloids, give us a peek into the lives of famous people. There are TV shows that do the same.Much of our conversation has to do with talking about people we know, or people we come across.

The Apostle Paul is one of the best known people in the Bible, a “star” in the early church, but obviously, Paul interacted with many other people – some who helped him, and others who hurt him. People whom we know little about.

Today, I’d like to take a brief look with you at some of these fascinating people, and how this might provide some instruction for the church today. We’ll be looking at 2 Timothy 4:9-21.

“Do your best to come to me soon, for Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me in ministry. I have sent Tychicus to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will pay him back for his deeds. You also must beware of him, for he strongly opposed our message. At my first defense no one came to my support, but all deserted me. May it not be counted against them! But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion’s mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. Greet Prisca and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus remained in Corinth; Trophimus I left ill in Miletus. Do your best to come before winter. Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brothers and sisters.”

*There is Timothy, to whom the letter was written.* Paul writes: “Do your best to come to me soon” (2 Timothy 4:9).Later, almost at the end of the letter, Paul writes: “Do your best to come before winter…” (verse 21).Timothy was young – like a son to Paul – but so valuable in Paul’s ministry. For some reason it was vitally important that Timothy go back to Paul *soon.*

Verse 10. “For *Demas*, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.” We don’t know for sure what happened here, but it was sad. In Philemon 24, Demas is listed as a fellow worker in the Lord. For some reason Demas deserted Paul, “in love with this present world”. Maybe he quit mission work and got another job, or went back to a previous job. Maybe he loved ease and comfort and material things more than the rigors and sacrifices that mission work demanded. We don’t know. But Demas was one of the people in

Paul’s life who deserted Paul, disappointed him, and fell away into worldly pursuits.

Verse 10. *Crescens*. “Crescens has gone to Galatia.” There is nothing else in the Bible about Crescens. Apparently, his work in ministry with Paul now required him to go to a different place, Galatia.

Verse 10. *Titus.* “Titus to Dalmatia.” Do you know anything about Titus? Titus was a valued, important coworker with Paul, mentioned different times in the New Testament. When there was trouble in Corinth, Titus helped Paul mend the problem. Paul once referred to Titus as “my own son” (Titus 1:4). Titus may mean little to us, but he was an important friend and colleague of Paul.

Verse 11. *Luke.*“Luke alone is with me.” Luke was a doctor. He wrote the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. Perhaps he accompanied Paul as his personal physician and dear coworker.

Luke was someonein Paul’s life who faithfully stood by him day after day!

Verse 11. *Mark.* “Get Mark, and bring him with you, for he is useful in my ministry.” There’s such a great story behind this! Mark had deserted Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary trip. Mark apparently got cold feet and chickened out. On the next trip, Barnabas wanted to take Mark again; Paul said, “No way!” Paul and Barnabas had a terrible argument over this, and split ways. There was a time when Paul had no use for Mark. But healing had taken place. Mark had gained credibility in Paul’s mind. So Paul writes to Timothy: “Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful in my ministry.”

Verse 12. *Tychicus.*“I have sent Tychicus to Ephesus.” Ever hear of Tychicus before? He’s a “nobody” to us, right? In Colossians 4:7 Paul writes of him: “He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord.” A trusted companion in God’s work.

We’re getting a glimpse of some of the *people* who were part of Paul’s world. But not all people were allies, friends!

Verses 14-15. *Alexander.*“Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will pay him back for all his deeds. You also must be aware of him, for he strongly opposed our message.” This guy was certainly not among Paul’s circle of friends and coworkers, but he was a person in Paul’s world who caused the apostle a lot of trouble.

In verses 16-18 Paul doesn’t mention anyone by name, but he refers to a preliminary hearing he had when he was on trial for preaching the gospel. No one showed up to support him. So, he had people who didn’t come through for him when he needed them.

The listing of the people in Paul’s life continues.

Verse 19. *Prisca and Aquila****.*** “Greet Prisca and Aquila.” They were a married couple, Christian believers. They took Paul into their home when Paul was in Corinth, always opening up their

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home for the church to meet. In Romans 16:4 Paul says they “risked their necks for my life.”

Did you know Prisca and Aquila did that for Paul. Wouldn’t you like to know the details of that story!

Verse 19. And then there was *Onesiphorus.* “Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus.” What a name! Ever hear of him before? But in 2 Timothy 1 it says Onesiphorus searched out Paul in prison, visited him, and refreshed his sagging spirits!

There are others – Erastus, Trophimus, Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, Claudia – people listed in 2 Timothy 4. *People* in Paul’s life and ministry, long forgotten, but critical to Paul and the spreading of the gospel!

As we think about this, here are some thoughts that come to my mind.

*We are in this together.* If you’re a follower of Jesus. you need other believers to walk with you in your journey!There was a popular song, *People.* Barbara Streisand sang it: “People, who need people, are the luckiest people in the world.”As gifted and dynamic and influential as Paul was, he needed other people to work with him and support him.We need not only Jesus, we need each other! I need you; you need me; we need eachother.

In our American culture, we’ve bought into a “Lone Ranger” type Christianity. I can be a Christian, but I don’t need the church. It’s just what I believe inside that matters. That’s not Biblical faith at all. Every true believer is part of the body of Christ. Maybe you’re an ear, or an eye, or a hand. And in 1 Corinthians 12 it says, “The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you, nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you” (1 Corinthians 12:21).

I can’t fulfill my call to ministry without you, and our working together. We can’t depend just on a couple of leaders to do the work here at Community UMC. This church will not survive unless we all work together to change and grow. If we’re to do the work of the gospel here, we all have to work together as a team. We can’t have anyone along just for the ride!

The Apostle Paul could never have done what he did without the people in his life, most of whose names are unknown to most of us.

Another thing:*Paul related to all types of people, with realism and love.* Did you notice the different types of people Paul mentions in his letter to Timothy?Faithful believers, dependable friends like Tychicus, Luke, Titus.But then there was Demas, the defector, and Alexander, a nasty and dangerousopponent of Paul and the work of Christ.Paul was honest and realistic about them!He called a spade a spade. Kind of like Jesus once called King Herod, “that fox”.

There are all kinds of people in the church. Some you can depend on, others you can’t. Some you can trust with a confidential matter, others can’t keep a secret. Some will stick by you, and others won’t. Some will encourage and inspire you, while others will pick and criticize. Some are steady in their devotion to the Lord, and others are shaky, and may fizzle out. Some (like

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Alexander) will fight you every inch, and oppose everything you try.

It sure does help if we can size up people honestly and accurately! I got my first taste of this as a youth, and a new Christian. There was a nearby pastor and evangelist who was a big hit with the kids. He spoke at many of our events. He’d make big promises, get you excited. But the next time he’d see you it was like he didn’t even recall what he promised you or your group. I had

to swallow the disappointment and realize you couldn’t really bank on him.

*Paul sized up people realistically, but he also showed love and compassion.* When no one stood with him in his first court hearing, he can say, “All deserted me. May it not be charged against them” Verse 16. No “I’ll get revenge” attitude.When Mark failed miserably, Paul eventually was able to forgive him and give him another chance.

Jesus never just said, “Be realistic in how you size up people.” Jesus said, “Love one another.” “Forgive.” “Pray for your persecutors; bless and do not curse them.” Love and mercy should color everything we do in the church!

One final thought: *What kind of person are you? What kind of person am I?* If you and I were part of Paul’s world back there in the 1st century, what might he have written about us? Hopefully, not like Alexander – a hindrance to the gospel! But a believer, part of Paul’s team, working to get the message about Jesus to the world. How would he have described us and summed up what we meant to him?

I suppose there’s some good and some bad in each of us: Sometimes we’re faithful, other times we’re not dependable. Sometimes we’re forgiving, other times we carry grudges. Sometimes we nitpick and criticize, other times we’re kind and gracious. Sometimes we’re in love with Christ, other times we’re in love with the world.

But looking at the big picture, kind of summing up our work and value as part of the church, the body of Christ? What are we like? What would the Apostle have said about us?

Hopefully, like a Prisca and Aquila, or an Onesiphorus, or a Luke – maybe not a household name for future generations, but a faithful servant and coworker for the Lord’s work!

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