

## **Homily – Every Time I Remember You**

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Twenty-one years ago my life took a zigzag and I got laid-off from Hewlett-Packard. It was one of the best things that ever happened to me.

I know that not everyone who has been through a lay-off can say that, but for me, the lay-off was life changing. For you see, the lay-off is what caused me to go to seminary and to start my ordination processes to become a priest. I would not be here today if I had not been laid-off from HP. However, at the time of the lay-off, I did not know how my life was to unfold.

Some of you may be able to relate to this, but for me the hardest part of getting laid-off was that I felt like I was leaving family. I felt like I was being separated from a group with which I had a strong identity. I felt like the group was moving on and I was being left behind. I was sad.

Some of you may be like me. I got a lot of my identity by being part of the group, by being part of the community that was Hewlett-Packard. In a world and culture in which individualism is prized, I had found value in being part of a large secular, corporate community.

In varying degrees, human beings are social animals who thrive in community. We are beings that have been created by God to be in relationships. There are many studies on happiness and well being that statistically show how important it is to be in community. People live longer and are happier when they are in healthy social relationships and community.

Conversely, it can be unsettling when that community shifts on us. Whether it is leaving a corporate community like HP, or moving from one place to another, there is a gap that is created when our sense of community changes.

During my farewell party from HP I was given an ID bracelet in which I had them engrave a reference to one of my favorite Bible verses. Philippians 1 – the verse that was read earlier. I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. For me this is a passage of hope. It is a passage of joy. And, it is a passage of community at its best. It is a passage about Christian community.

Two thousand years ago, the Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the church in the city of Philippi. Paul wrote many letters to the various earlier churches and each letter that we still have today in our canon has a different tone, and a different feel. This letter

to the Philippines seems to be to a community that is much loved by Paul. It seems to be to a community that Paul thinks is getting it right. Reading this letter makes me want to be a part of that community in Philippi.

I thank my God every time I remember you. I want someone to say that about me. In fact, if I were being honest, I want everyone to say that about me. What greater praise could there be? I thank my God every time I remember you. Sometimes as we pray, we thank God for something good that has happened and sometimes we ask God to fix things. But, our passage today is not one of those prayers.

It's not "God could you fix this thing about Rob." And, it's not "Thank you Rob for your work as a priest." This passage today is somebody thanking God for my very being. I thank my God every time I remember you.

I want to belong to a group that says that. I think that is the way a community of God is supposed to work. We are supposed to build each other up. We are supposed to praise each other. We are supposed to validate and affirm each other for just being who we are. We could all use a healthy dose of affirmation, and our passage today from the beginning of Paul's letter to the Philippians shows us that communities of God are meant to affirm one another.

Paul also shows us that the affirmation is based on something truly simple. It is not based on showing good sales results for the quarter. It is not based on winning or losing a baseball game. It is not based on any type of result. It is simply based on a common faith in the gospel of Jesus. Two thousand years ago, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus changed the universe forever. There are a lot of ideas about what changed, but we are united in the fact that something did change. Being a community of God unites us in love and this love is all we need to affirm one another. We are united in God's love for every single one of us and we are united in Christ.

I thank my God every time I remember you. Paul is modeling how important it is to affirm others in our community. Giving praise and affirmation is as important as getting it and that is the message of our simple yet joyful passage.

Now, I have been gone from St. Barnabas for the last three weeks. Two of those weeks I was in Louisville, Kentucky for General Convention of the Episcopal Church. Next week I will talk more about General Convention, but today there is one thing I want to share. Each day before we ended our legislative session we would have a series of resolutions in the category of Privilege and Courtesy. These resolutions were always read aloud and they were always about thanking someone or some people for the work they had done in our church and in the world. And it wasn't just gratitude for what these people had done. It was also appreciation for their very being itself. It can be quite meaningful to have twelve hundred people stand and cheer for you. Praise and affirmation is important and that is part of the work that we did at General

Convention each day. This was the type of affirmation modeled by Paul and the house church in today's reading. It is so very important for us, here at St. Barnabas, to be a community of God that shares with one another and takes the time to affirm one another. And, takes the time now, right now, to affirm one another.

Let me share one last story about community. A few years ago, I was talking to the Rector of a growing parish, and I asked him why he thought they were growing. And he said, "Rob, we have noticed that many people here in California want to be in community with others but they don't know how. They drive from work to their garage and spend time in their fenced in backyard and they don't know how to be in community. And, here at our church we help people get into healthy community." This Rector said, "People don't just come here to worship on Sunday morning. They spend the entire week in community with one another." This is a community that walks with each other. They talk with each other. They listen to each other's stories and hold each other accountable. And, at the same time this is a community of people that wants to walk closer with God.

I thank my God every time I remember you. This really appeals to me. Maybe this vision of an affirming community of God really appeals to you too. Maybe you want to know and be known. Maybe you want to be where people know your name. Maybe you want to be in a place that affirms and validates you for being who you are. And, maybe you want to do the same for others. And, maybe, here at St. Barnabas, you are already in that type of community.

My prayer for all of, especially in this difficult political season, is that we are a life-affirming community of God and that we share the love of Jesus with one another. I thank my God every time I remember you.