



**Carstairs-Bancroft United Church**  
April 6, 2021  
**DAILY ENCOURAGEMENT**  
**DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC**  
**By Rev. Maria Szabone Berces**



Source: dreamstime.com

Beloved Carstairs Bancroft United Church Members,

While the close contact that the above picture shows is not recommended during the still ongoing pandemic, the companionship we may have as members of our church family is still a reality we can appreciate.

It's interesting that even the university research mentioned in today's Our Daily Bread meditation confirms the importance and positive effects of close relationships. The valuable and supportive companionship, which is a significant part of our Christian heritage and faith, is there for us during times of trials and hardships.

First of all, we may know that whether we live with others, or by ourself, God offers to be with us always. You can probably quote the words of the New Creed by heart by now: *"We are not alone, ... In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God."* (A New Creed)

This belief confirms to us that whether we have family/human support or not, we are still upheld by the Holy One. As King David sensed and put down in Psalm 139: **"You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely. ... For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb."** (Psalm 139:1-4;13)

God knows us better than anyone else, and loves us with our iniquities and potentials. This is why Paul expressed it with awe: **"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** (Romans 5:6-8)

And before Jesus did die for us, asked his disciples to love likewise: **"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."** (John 13:34-35)

We belong to one another by the blood shed for us on the cross. And believing in the love that was showed to us in this sacrifice makes us the members of the same family. As John put it: **"to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God"** (John 1:12) This belonging is valid even as we have to keep a physical distance. We can hold one another in prayers, and use the phone, e-mails and Internet to keep connected. By this we can remind each other about the Love that brought us together into the same 'household'. Because we all have a God who promised: **"I will never leave you nor forsake you."** (Joshua 1:5)

Grace and Peace to You All,

Rev. Maria



## Companions in Christ

*I thank my God every time I remember you.*

Philippians 1:3

### READ Philippians 1:3–8

The Harvard Study of Adult Development is a decades-long project that's resulted in a greater understanding of the importance of healthy relationships. The research began with a group of 268 sophomores at Harvard University in the 1930s and later expanded to, among others, 456 Boston inner-city residents. Researchers have conducted interviews with the participants and pored over their medical records every few years. They discovered that close relationships are the biggest factor in predicting happiness and health. It turns out that if we surround ourselves with the right people, we'll likely experience a deeper sense of joy.

This appears to reflect what the apostle Paul is describing in Philippians 1. Writing from prison, Paul can't help but tell his friends that he thanks God for them every time he remembers them, praying "with joy" (v. 4). But these aren't just any friends; these are brothers and sisters in Jesus who "share in God's grace," partners in the gospel with Paul (v. 7). Their relationship was one of sharing and mutuality—a true fellowship shaped by God's love and the gospel itself.

Yes, friends are important, but fellow companions in Christ are catalysts of a true and deep joy. The grace of God can bind us together like nothing else. And even through the darkest seasons of life, the joy that comes from that bond will last. – By **Glenn Packiam**

### REFLECT & PRAY

**Dear God, thank You for the gift of friendship. Help me to express my gratitude to those who have been faithful companions to me. Give me the grace to strengthen and encourage them. Amen.**

Who are the friends that surround you? What's the substance of your relationships? How has the grace of God shaped your choice of companions?

### SCRIPTURE INSIGHT

When Paul recalled his relationship with the Philippians "from the first day until now" (Philippians 1:5), he was giving them reasons for hope going forward (v. 6). He and his companions had tried to go elsewhere before receiving a vision from God to come to their region (Acts 16:6–12). Soon after his arrival, they met Lydia. She and some other women had been meeting on a riverbank outside of town waiting for God to answer their prayers (vv. 13–15). Her spiritual openness followed by the baptism of her household was the beginning of things to come (vv. 16–40). What an introduction! In Philippi, Paul and Silas encountered a demon-possessed fortune teller; were arrested, beaten, imprisoned; survived an earthquake; and witnessed the amazing story of a jailer's conversion and the baptism of his family. It was God who'd brought them all together.

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