

June 20, 2021

A Letter from Paul – Philippians
V. Have This Mind Among Yourselves
Philippians 2:1-11

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The night of Jesus' arrest, the disciples gathered with Jesus in an upper room to observe the Passover. The journey they had made from Bethany into Jerusalem was not far, but far enough for everyone's sandaled feet to get filthy on that road of rocks and sand. But upon arriving, they found no servant waiting at the door with basin and towel to wash their feet, as would have been customary before the meal. So, Jesus took off His outer garment, tied a towel around his waist, poured water into a basin and knelt down before each disciple in turn to wash their feet. I imagine not a word was spoken – more something like shock falling upon the disciples. For such a task was so far beneath the status of a great man of God like Jesus. Peter eventually put this fact into some form of protest, refusing at first to let Jesus wash his feet. But Jesus prevailed. The Master had performed the role of a servant. He who ought to have been served by the disciples, had humbled Himself and served them instead.¹

And this is the mindset Paul has in mind when he writes to the Philippians, *“Have this same mind among yourselves.”* *“Have this same mind among yourselves”* – the mind of the Messiah, who sought not to be served, but to serve. The mind of the Incarnate Son of God, who humbled Himself not only on that one night, but whose entire life was an object lesson in humility. An object lesson in humility, and also selfless, sacrificial service for others. A life which culminated in the greatest act of self-forgetting and other-embracing humble service that this world has ever witnessed – His death upon the cross for the sake of sinners such as Paul and the Twelve and you and me and all who draw breath upon this planet. *“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.”*

“Have this same mind among yourselves.” Humility – in a world where we are taught from birth to put ourselves first always – instead to follow Christ and to live by humility: *“Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.”* Self-forgetting, self-sacrificing service to others – in a world where we learn from birth that such is a sucker's play, a loser's move, a sign of weakness – even so, to follow Christ in self-forgetting, self-sacrificing service to others: *“Let each of you look not only to his or her own interests, but also to the interests of others.”* You know, I can't think of anything else in this world as it is, in these hearts and minds of ours as they are, where the Gospel seems more out-of-step, out-of-touch, ridiculous and even impossible. In the words of Frederick Buechner:

*If the world is sane, then Jesus is mad as a hatter and the
Last Supper is the Mad Tea Party. The world says, Mind your own*

business, and Jesus says, There is no such thing as your own business. The world says, Follow the wisest course and be a success, and Jesus says, Follow me and be crucified. The world says, Drive carefully – the life you save may be your own – and Jesus says, Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. The world says, Law and order, and Jesus says, Love. The world says, Get, and Jesus says, Give. In terms of the world's sanity, Jesus is crazy as a coot, and anybody who thinks he can follow him without being a little crazy too is laboring less under the cross than under a delusion. "We are fools for Christ's sake," Paul says, faith says – the faith that ultimately the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men, the lunacy of Jesus saner than the grim sanity of the world.²

"Have this same mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus."

Why should we even try to do this? Why should we seek to follow the example of Jesus and make ourselves ridiculous, losers, before a world which always puts "me" first? Why should we practice humility in how we see others in relation to ourselves, and practice self-sacrificial service instead of always trying to get our own way?

Paul gives us three good reasons. One – the obvious one – is because this really **is** how Jesus lived, and what Jesus again and again taught us about how we are to live if we are to be His disciples. And if we are not willing to put into practice what our Master has taught us, if we are not willing even to give it a go, then it is the height of falsehood and hypocrisy to claim that Jesus really is our Teacher, really is our Lord. Remember what He told His disciples after He finished washing their feet – He left little doubt about what He expected of them, and us:

When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you."³

We are to seek to have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus, says Paul – to seek to do as He has done, to think as He has taught us, to live as He has shown us – simply because He is who He is, and because we have acknowledged Him to be the Great Teacher, the True Example, the Way and the Truth and the Life which leads us to the Father's House and its many mansions.⁴ That is, literally, what discipleship means – to learn how to live from Jesus, and to put what we have learned into practice.

And then, second, Paul tells us we are to do this because without our having learned humility and self-sacrificing service, we bring dishonor to the cause of Christ in this world. Apart from lives lived in unity and harmony within the Body of Christ, the Gospel will not receive a hearing from the world around us. And the only way for us to live in unity and harmony within

the Body of Christ is for us to put into practice this Christ-like humility and this Christ-like self-sacrificial service towards one another. Paul started in on this subject last week: *“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 . . .”*⁵ And he says it again this morning: *“Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.”* And how do we get there from here? *“Do nothing from rivalry 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. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.”*

But it is Jesus who said it best. Shortly after He had finished washing the disciples’ feet, Jesus said this to them: *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*⁶

So, we prove our membership in Christ to the world by the way we live in harmony and unity within the Body of Christ. But it’s even more important than that – there is something even far greater at stake than proof of our own status in Christ in how we live together in unity and harmony and love within the Church. It is our very unity and harmony and love for one another in the Church which will convince the world that Jesus is for real, that Jesus really is from the Father. For Jesus, after that foot washing and just before His arrest, prays something which His Church has spent the past two millennia completely ignoring. Jesus prays:

*I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.*⁷

We seek to live in humility and self-sacrificial service not only because that is the way of Christ, our Teacher, but also because that is the only way for us to show to the world that God was truly in Christ, reconciling all things to Himself. For if we, who are called by His Name, cannot even be reconciled to one another within the Body of Christ – to be one in that Body – then how will the world ever come to believe in the reconciling power of the Christ we claim to serve?

And then, the third reason for why we are to live in this way of humility and sacrificial service: simply put, because this is the way of the Kingdom of God which is coming. Selfishness, conceit, the seeking of self and worldly success above all else – that is the way of the world which will one day be coming to an end. The way of humility and self-sacrificial service – the way of Christ – will be validated in the end, will be proven to have been the right way to live in the end, will be proven to be the path by which the Kingdom of God is established. Because, in the end, *“at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* It isn’t just the Kingship

of Christ which is validated in the end, but also the example of Christ, the manner of Christ, the teachings of Christ – all of this will be included when the world bows down before Him. So, we are privileged to be able to live now by that way and that truth and that life which belongs to Christ and to the Kingdom of Christ – that Kingdom which will still stand long after this world and its ways are no more. That is why, finally, we seek to have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus – humility and self-sacrificing service – because at the end Christ Jesus will reign forever and ever.

So, how then do we do this? How do we follow this path of humility and self-sacrificial service? How does the example of Jesus begin to live in us? Paul's wording is somewhat unusual when you think about it – and therein lies our clue: *“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.”* It's very similar to what he said last week, which was also unusual: *“Only let your manner of life be worthy.”* Do you hear the passive voice of the verb? Not “make your life worthy”, but “let/allow your life to be made worthy. By whom? By Christ, of course, and by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. And this morning we find much the same voice – “have this mind which you already have in you in Christ Jesus.” In other words, humility and self-sacrificial service are not something out there that we must attain; rather they are something already in here – head and heart – through the teachings and example of Jesus (head) and through the presence of His Holy Spirit within us (heart). What we do is not strive hard to be humble – which, in the end, never works out because we only become more and more proud of how humble we are becoming! Rather, what we do is allow the Word of Christ and the Indwelling of the Holy Spirit to teach, enable, and empower our heads and hearts so that we will become those able to do what Christ has done.

Maybe all that sounds a little too mystical, so let me try to make it a little more concrete. It has been my experience as a writer of sermons that the Lord often likes to have a little fun at my expense – to give me a little test of whether I really believe what I am preparing to preach on Sunday. I'll be writing a sermon on forgiveness, for example, and I'll get a call from someone I really need to forgive from the heart. I hate it when God does that to me – even though it is for my own good. Well, He did it to me again this week, with this sermon. Tuesday midday, I'm in my office thinking deep and lofty thoughts about humility and self-sacrificial service when Jonene buzzed me to tell me someone was asking to speak with me – someone looking for prayer with the pastor. Now, in my experience, looking for prayer with the pastor usually turns out to mean asking for money from the pastor – so I immediately started thinking of how I could get out of this. My office has three doors and a private restroom, which means I have a lot of ways to get out of things I don't want to do. And I didn't want to do this.

But I had a problem. I looked at the clock and realized I had just a few minutes to get downstairs to the Fellowship Hall to find Phil Lyles before he and the rest of our High School Mission Team set out for their afternoon project. I needed to consult with Phil about a couple of urgent church items. So, I didn't want to see this fellow, but I also needed to get downstairs in a hurry – and there was only one way I could accomplish both. I rushed out of my office, through Jonene's office like an Olympic race-walker – the fastest you can go without actually running. This fellow immediately saw me, and called out, *“Pastor?”* I sped up. He followed me. I couldn't shake him even after whizzing through the Parlor.

And then two things happened at the same time – neither of which I can take any credit for. He kept calling, and so finally I turned and looked at him, and was just about to tell him I was too busy to meet with him right now. I was clearly not counting him as someone more significant than myself, nor looking also to the interests of others. I turned and looked at him, saw his face, the expression in his eyes – I saw him, and in that instant could see the hurt in his eyes. And then the second thing, God whispering in my ear at that very moment the very verses I had just been thinking such lofty thoughts about: *“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. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.”*

And I was trapped. I wasn’t going to be able to outrun this guy and get to the Fellowship Hall. But, even more, I wasn’t going to be able to outrun the Word of Christ echoing around in my head and the Holy Spirit stirring up the guilt and also compassion in my heart. So, I stopped, invited him to sit down with me in the parlor, listened to his story, prayed with him and gave him the help he needed. And it was the best moment of my day, of my week. But understand, I can’t take any credit for any of that. It was, just as Paul describes it, something which was already in me – Christ’s Word and the Holy Spirit – which made it happen. I had, with great resistance and immense reluctance, nonetheless still acted like a Christian, acted like Christ would want me to – because of His Word in my head and His Holy Spirit in my heart. And Christ gets all the credit for making it happen.

And that is how it happens. We let the teachings of Christ fill our heads – seeking to learn from His Word, daily and deeply, how to live. And we give space to the Holy Spirit in our hearts, through our meditation and prayer, opening up and deepening the communication between our hearts and the Heart of God. And all we then do is let Christ’s Word and the Holy Spirit’s urging get our attention, let them have their way in us, allow them to prompt us to the right action at the right moment, and so create and reveal in us the same mind which was and is in Christ Jesus. We let Jesus live and act and speak through us.

¹ John 13:1-11.

² Frederick Buechner, The Faces of Jesus (New York: Stearn/Harper & Row, 1989), p. 136.

³ John 13:12-15.

⁴ John 14:1-6.

⁵ Philippians 1:27.

⁶ John 13:34-35.

⁷ John 17:20-23.