

The Mind of Christ
Jubilee Mennonite Church
October 1, 2017

Purpose: To declare the working of God in the way of Christ.

Message: As people of God we are challenged to conform our thinking to new forms and new ways, keep our eyes on Christ.

Scriptures: Philippians 2:1-13 (I will read); Psalm 25:1-9 (Please read/have read)

Synopsis: Changing our minds is probably our most challenging task. We diet, we work, we TRY to change the various things about our lives that we could do better. We can be successful for a while, but time and again, we find ourselves back in the same habits from which we started. Absent changing our minds—the intents and meanings of ourselves—little sticks for long. This is why Paul’s imploring the church of Philippi to the mind of Christ is so important. It is the work of the Christian life of time and again allowing the way and pattern of Christ to have sway in us that makes the difference. It is this mind focused on the way of God that changes our way of being in the world and to which we all aspire for true change in life and living.

Philippians 2:1-13 New International Version (NIV)

2 Therefore if you have any encouragement
from being united with Christ,
if any comfort from his love,
if any common sharing in the Spirit,
if any tenderness and compassion,

2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded,
having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.

3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit.
Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,
4 not looking to your own interests
but each of you to the interests of the others.

5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in very nature[a] God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

7 rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature[b] of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

8 And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,

10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—
not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—
continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,
13 for it is God who works in you to will
and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

We love these words. They are some of OUR words, those quotes of the biblical text of such beauty and clarity that we know them better than most. Especially that middle part—the being in nature God and coming to serve in order that every knee should bend. That’s the meat of the verse. As you may already know this is a hymn; the words of hymn that is thought to have been sung by believers of the Way since the very beginning. It is one of our core texts, speaking of the Lordship of Christ and reminding us of what we are often in need of reminding of: that ours should be the mindset of Christ, taking on the ways and means of the Son of God. We love this text for this very reason—its beauty and its challenge. This is one of our bumper sticker sort of verses that tells a story we know and love, often keeping it tucked away in between the pages of our bibles on the book mark we might have this on.

All of which is well and good. Yet, we know that Paul wrote these words for a purpose. He implores these particular friends of his to stay strong in their foundational confession: the Jesus Christ is Lord. Not that this is particular novel for Paul to be doing, but there are some reasons for why this particular mention to these particular people are indeed significant. Sometimes there are little bits and pieces of context that the intervening millennia have washed away, and we have to work to notice what is going on again. Phillipi is a perfect example of this. Almost 100 years before Paul put pen to paper, a decisive battle in a Roman civil war was fought and won in the area of Phillipi. Marc Anthony and Cassius defeated Brutus, the assassin the Shakespeare made famous and would be emperor (e; Tu Brute?). As the old saying goes, to the victor goes the spoils; and the landowners were thrown off the land, and the victorious troops were granted land with the thanks of the newly powerful Caesar. The same thing happened again 10 years later, and Philippi was populated with the militarily powerful to secure the area. They were given special rights not to pay taxes and to pass on their property at death. All in all, this is one of the Roman cities there was. The people who made Rome what it was settled down here, embracing all that Rome had to offer—its economy, its social ranking system, its system of competitive system of social honor and prestige, the worship of Caesar not just as leader, but as God. And it is this context that he chooses to offer the sage advice that those who follow Jesus should have the same mind as Christ and follow after him, declaring Jesus Christ as Lord. This is no mere bumper sticker sentiment we are dealing with here. You can imagine the meaning of these words in this town of all towns. You can really only have one Lord; one person who you

serve. When you say that Jesus is Lord, you are saying the Caesar is not. When you discipline yourself to hold the mind of Christ, you are reshaping your mind toward the way of Christ and away from the way things usually are.

We can all rattle off our vital statistics. Our Names, address, date of birth, and on it goes. Spend any time in the health care system, you will get quite good at it and they check time and again just to be sure they are giving the right shot to the right person. It is how we know who we are. It is how we tell our stories, and identify ourselves to a waiting and skeptical world. Sometimes, we take on identity just because we have had told the same story so many times.

Yet in the midst of all those vital identifiers of ourselves, the question “who is your Lord” takes a great deal of priority. No one asks because no one cares. We are free agents. We answer to no one. We have our vote, our independence. Yet, just last week we witnessed 2 of our own speaking those very words of Lordship right here on this stage. What does that mean? Long gone is the Feudal system and all which that imposed. What, exactly, are we dealing with when we work with a notion as radical as declaring the Jesus Christ is Lord? Is this even something that has any meaning, let alone consequence to us today? What does it mean to us now to say something like Jesus Christ is Lord, to take that Lordship on ourselves?

I think there is still much here; not as much has changed in the centuries between now and then. While we may be done with the structure and culture of Lords and Ladies to whom we owe allegiance that does not mean that we are lacking for things that would call us to obedience. Ours is a culture and a world that has pronounced ways and norms of being in the world. Force is valued over love. Competition out-strips sharing. Social status and political power remain more attractive than the meaninglessness of those on the margins. Profits are the universal good, not the welfare of the people who create them. Those who win our societal game are those who find themselves with the most power, prestige, and money at the end of the day. These assumptions of how the world works and where our priorities ought to lie cry to us each and every day, telling us the story of the world as it is; shaping us into the people we are meant to be, the way of the empire in which we live. Our lives are easier because we value our status as citizens, our ability to consume, our place in the percentiles of power. It’s an intoxicating sense of power, even

though we seldom feel powerful. Like the recipients of Paul's letter in Philippi, we are given a far different model to follow.

So, as we have spoken these all important words, we are implored by Paul to 'take on the Mind of Christ.' What does that mean? Paul gives some fairly clear examples: to be compassionate; considerate; to put the preferences of ourselves in the backseat and think of others at least alongside of ourselves if not in front of ourselves. To be about the work of incarnating the love of God to all that we do and seek. I don't know about you, but I find this an utterly challenging prescription. Isn't it nice to know that over 2000 years of church history that all the way back at the very beginning that they were having some of the same problems of being church together, and loving one another that we do today? People come and set up their own needs first; we sometimes are not as kind as we could be to one another, we seek to know what it is that we are getting out of this, or that our personal preferences are being served. In short, our minds which operate on business as usual of this world, of this Empire remain as persistently unchangeable as ever.

What does it mean to have the same mind as was in Christ? It means to let go. To let go of the power we claim. To let go of the story of the world that we tell time and again, and to pick up a truly different story. That is the work we undertake walking again the way of the cross this week. We need to be reminded that ours is a vocation of a servant, and the power we have is not our own. We claim the power is God's, but we see Christian celebrities – athletes, politicians, movie stars – nod to the God they follow as the source of their success, making God a get-well quick scheme. Even when we are serving, are trying our best, our own inclinations often get the better of us.

In our house, we have the short hand of "putting on our capes" for our inclination to hear problems as an opportunity to dash in and save the day by making everything alright again. Because that is what we pastors like to do—we like to fix things, to make them better and to save the day. The trouble with this is, most of the time there isn't a whole lot to be done, and even when there is, often it is as much a function of simply showing up and representing God in whatever way we can think of, most of which feels woefully inadequate to the task. Sometimes, even

when we want to help, we want the help to be about us and our compassion and our ability and not about God. It is very easy to forget whose mind we are working with. Because as easily as we say “Oh, I just changed my mind” to really change our mind—to change our minds really and change our thinking is far harder. Anyone who has had to change themselves from the inside out knows this. And this is what we are invited to allow Jesus to do to us and with us every day.

Writer and teach Arthur Paul Boers says in *Teach us Lord How to Pray*, “Our power comes from knowing God and God’s power. This knowing is different than striving for power. It enables us to live by God’s priorities even if they do not appear immediately effective.” We are best in relationship with our Lord, best in compliance with the mind of Christ when we unclench our “rightful and fightful” fists, and accept that which is not ours. That is what taking on the mind of Christ is all about. That is how true power is conveyed, by knowing it is not ours, and opening our hearts to be shaped by the declaration of allegiance the Christ is Lord, and the world is not.

A single sermon is not nearly enough to begin to open the meaning of this radical, revolutionary, world-altering concept. We repeat these words, we tell this story because we must. This story of betrayal, death, and what comes after is our story. There is one Lord, Jesus whom God has raised from the dead, and to whom everyone else will, in time, come to bow and confess. This was a dangerous story to tell in a place like Philippi. It is a dangerous story to tell here and now.

By God’s Grace, the story of the servant Christ becomes our story, the church’s story. This song, ancient hymn that it is, lets us hear yet again what God has done-- loved us to death in Jesus Christ—and what God will do yet again in our lives, and in all creation as it is brought to life and celebration declaring Jesus Christ is Lord, to the Glory of God. May this be our confession, our song, our story, forever more. Amen.