

The Mind of Christ
Menno Mennonite Church
October 11, 2020

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 2:1-11 (I will 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 2:1-11
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 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 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.

These are, in a real way OUR words. We know them well—the most ancient of hymns and beautiful of images. There are any number of snippets in there that we might take and shape for our own, memorializing the way and the will of Christ. Especially that middle part—the being in the same mind of Christ and, being in the nature of God, Christ will in time bring all things into an act of worship. We know it and love it well. An anchor text, it is part of the wood work of how we think about the faithful servant, the lordship of Christ and the way of Christ. We embrace its beauty, but can struggle with its challenge. While this verse and the ideas it contains works well on a bumper sticker, I am not always as sure that this is where it most rightly belongs.

Because I am not quite sure if this sense of being implored toward the way of Christ as a pious good idea or some sense of the by-and-by accomplishment of Christ glorified is what Paul has in mind here. Separated as we are in time and space from the moment, and with a couple thousand years of encouragement to read these words primarily as personal adoration of an eventuality than a description of the present state of affairs.

Say what you will about Paul, though, he is not one to miss a good opportunity, nor to mince words about calling people to the way of Christ. He is commending the readers yet again to what, for him, is the fundamental confession of the Christian life: that Jesus Christ is Lord. Which is a big deal. Sometimes we miss that precisely because we are where we are and he is where he is. But I think there is little doubt of his meaning here.

Because he is writing to the church at Philippi. Which seems a most obvious comment unless you do a bit of contextual research into the culture of the place and the time. 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 Philippi. Marc Anthony and Cassius, the assassin the Shakespeare made famous, defeated Brutus became 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 most Roman cities there was, invested in the ways and times of the empire. 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 who controlled the goings and comings in this world and the next.

This 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, predicting that in the fullness of time that this will be the revelation of all who would see. This is no mere bumper sticker sentiment we are dealing with here. 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. This is how we present ourselves to a questioning world. It is a thoughtless practice—name, rank and serial number (or social security number) to unlock the business that needs to be accomplished.

In the midst of this, however, the question of “who is your Lord” rarely comes up. Both because it would be weird, something out of a Tolkien epic of some sort, but also because we are pretty sure that all that is over and done with. We are pretty emphatic that we are free agents and answer to no one. We have our voice, our property and our rights, and we ought to be left well alone if ANYONE wants to tell us what we want to do. Yet, the vast majority of us have at one point in our lives stopped and in front of God and the community declared with bended knee and bowed, baptized head that we serve YHWH God and Jesus Christ as Lord, come what may. Anabaptists call this the second baptism, after the baptism of the Spirit and before the baptism of Blood, but strangely enough the third one doesn’t often make the brochures for “*so, you want to be baptized.*” I wonder, what do these words of Paul invoking the Lordship of Christ in a Lordship of Caesar have to do with us in this day well away from the feudal presumptions? What does it mean to live with the concept of Jesus Christ is Lord, especially in a culture that is so very keen to take Lordship as a personal and private affair alone if it all?

I think the answer is plenty. 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. I have been impressed in these last months with the meanings of citizenship and what it means to be in transition between one set of powers and the next. Unless you have stepped into the system of trying to find status, you cannot really understand the vagaries and powers at work within it.

It is in this place that we are invited into the Lordship of Christ. We are implored by Paul to take on the same mind as Christ. Paul doesn't leave that as mere suggestion. He goes on to illustrate some specific qualities: 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. What a challenging prescription. Anyone who has tried to diet can tell you that the food is not the challenge (well, boiled chicken can only do so much on its own). The real challenge is in changing the mindset that has us, for me, craving junk food every time I am on the road. One of the side benefits you offer a pastor here is a natural health club as you really have to mean it if you want to hit the drive thru. Changing our minds from that of the cultural assumption of personal ambition as being the end of all things, and personal opinion offering license for the dismissal of the other as naïve at best, malignant at worst to the one who focuses on the divine spark where ever it is found takes some work. It is hard to let go of that which we can value most.

Having the same mind as Christ means that we are invited to let go. To let go of the power we claim. To let go of the assumption that absolute personal safety is the best possible outcome in every case. 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 in walking the way of the cross. We need to be reminded so often that ours is a vocation of a servant, and the power we have is not our own. We claim the power is God's, not in the sense of the celebrity nod to the God they follow as the source of our success, making God a get-well quick scheme. Rather the Lord we are invited to follow is the one who declares that death, ultimately, has no sting when it comes in the context of the resurrecting God. It means that these days of decision are not our ultimate act

of allegiance but rather one more chance to inhabit the work of heralding the Kingdom on Earth not in where we mark a ballot, but rather in how we embody the hope of Christ within the process even if we find ourselves, perhaps, disappointed or disillusioned whatever happens next. We easily as we say “Oh, I just changed my mind” but rarely do we accomplish the feat. That true change is far harder than simply beginning the process. Yet we are invited into it time and again. 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 in all its alluring forms and facsimiles of power, is not.

Any single sermon is not nearly able to open the meaning of this radical, revolutionary, world-altering concept. We repeat these words, we tell this story because we must. It is part of re-shaping our minds. 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.