

# The mind of Christ

Bible reference for sermon: Philippians 2:1-13

*If, then, there is any comfort in Christ, any consolation from love, any partnership in the Spirit, any tender affection and sympathy, <sup>2</sup>make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. <sup>3</sup>Do nothing from selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup>Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup>Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.*

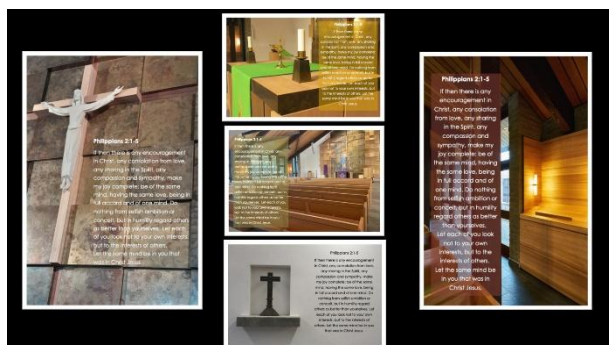
Grace, peace and mercy are ours through our Triune God. Amen.

Today I'll be preaching on the reading from Philippians. If you've been around St Paul's for a while you'll know how much we as pastors love Paul's letter to the Philippians. Especially Pastor Nev. He's nuts about it!

It featured heavily two years ago when we undertook a congregation-wide dwelling in the word on this particular letter.

We invited your feedback about how this part of scripture might be speaking to us as a community. And you gave us amazing feedback and commentary that helped us form the seven values we now hold to as a community. And the Philippians influence goes even further! As staff we each have a different framed photo of St Paul's with the words we have just heard in verses 1-5. Words to accompany us, direct us and inspire us as we minister together.

Worship and spiritual purpose  
Welcoming and belonging  
Authentic, joyful service  
Outreach and engagement  
Diversity and inclusion  
Unity and community  
Trust and hope

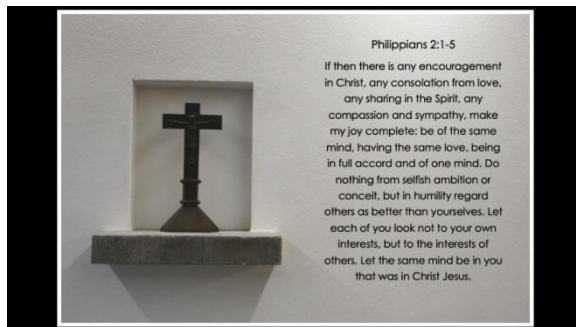


Philippians *is* just wonderful! But there is something wonderfully *inconvenient* about the way Paul writes to the Philippians. Because if we are honest, we probably like Christianity best when it is about us and God. My faith. My relationship with God. My salvation. My prayers. My spiritual growth. And then Paul comes along and says: 'Yes, of course all of that matters. But

what if following Jesus is also about the person sitting next to you?'

"Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others." That sounds lovely—until you meet an actual other person. The person who irritates you. The person who sees things differently. The person that shares our facilities that we don't quite

understand. The person who says something at a church meeting and suddenly you discover that your inner peace was apparently very fragile.



Paul is writing to a Christian community that knows something about this. Philippi is not a congregation where everybody agrees. Later in this letter Paul names Euodia and Syntyche and pleads with them to “be of the same mind in the Lord.” We don’t know what they were arguing about and perhaps that is a gift to us, because if Paul had told us, we would immediately decide which one was right and

form teams for and against. Instead, we are simply told that there is a fracture in the community. And Paul wants to, and needs to, address it. But notice where he begins – not by telling them they are terrible Christians. He begins with grace.

“Since there is encouragement in Christ, since there is consolation from love, since there is fellowship in the Spirit, since there is compassion and sympathy...”

*Since.* Not *if*. Paul is reminding them of what is already true. You belong to Christ. You have experienced love. You share in the Spirit. God has already been at work among you. So, Paul says, live like the people God has already made you to be. God has loved you in Christ. Now, what might that love look like when it runs loose in your life?

Paul then says, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.” That verse can go wrong very quickly. Some of us have been taught that being Christian means having a low opinion of ourselves. Be humble. Don’t speak up. Don’t make a fuss. Put everyone else first. Accept whatever happens. And sometimes that has been used to tell people—especially people with less power—to put up with things that should never have been tolerated. But Christian humility is not self-hatred. It is not pretending you have no gifts. It is not allowing yourself to be bullied. It is certainly not giving powerful people permission to exploit vulnerable people.

The humility Paul describes is more interesting. It is the decision to stop making yourself the centre of the universe. To stop asking only, “What does this mean for me?” and begin asking, “What does this mean for us?” And perhaps even more radically: “What does this mean for them?” Paul’s words here reflect the questions we are currently encouraging everyone to ask as we partner with our sisters and brothers in the Chinese Church:

**“How is God calling us to work together?”**

**“How might this decision affect our ministry partner?”**

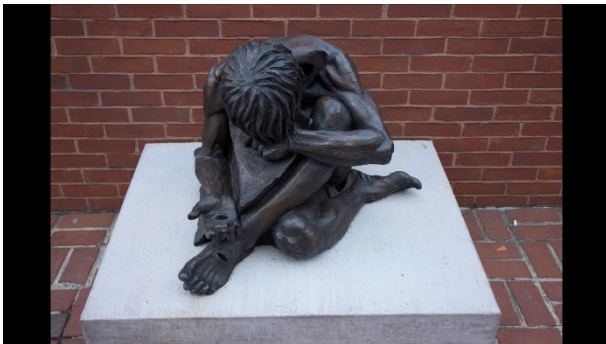
Paul says, “Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.” He doesn’t say, “Don’t have interests” or “Your needs don’t matter.” He says: As you pursue unity don’t look only at yourself. Look around. There are other people here. Other stories. Other wounds. Other hopes. Christian unity is not the same thing as everyone becoming identical. It doesn’t mean everybody thinks the same, talks the same, sings the same songs,

or has exactly the same preferences. As one of you wrote to us back when we were looking at the book of Philippians; “Being of ‘one mind’ doesn't mean we need to agree on everything, but we need to handle it as one mind. We all work towards the same goal and all our names are in the book of life.”

I don't think Paul's vision is uniformity but is of a community in which people make room for one another. A community in which I am free enough in Christ to say: “Perhaps I don't have to win this.” “Perhaps I can listen.” “Perhaps I can make room.” “Perhaps the person I disagree with is not my enemy.” And then Paul gives us the reason:

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” The word “mind” means more than having the correct beliefs. It is about a way of seeing and approaching life. And, ultimately, Paul gives us Jesus. Jesus, who was “in the form of God,” but did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited. Instead, he emptied himself. He took the form of a slave. He became human. He humbled himself. He became obedient to the point of death—“even death on a cross.”

“Being of ‘one mind’ doesn't mean we need to agree on everything, but we need to handle it as one mind. We all work towards the same goal and all our names are in the book of life.”



And here we hear something extraordinary about God. We can sometimes imagine God as the ultimate person at the top of the pyramid: the one with all the power, untouchable and above everything. But then Paul says: Look at Jesus. Look at what God is like. God does not cling to power. God does not exploit status. God does not stand at a safe distance from human suffering. God comes down. God enters the

mess. God becomes vulnerable. God gets tired. God weeps. God touches lepers. God eats with sinners. God welcomes children and notices people everyone else overlooks. And God ends up on a cross.

The God revealed in Jesus is a God who moves towards people, especially people who are vulnerable, forgotten and pushed aside. This is what theologians call *kenosis*—self-emptying. But self-emptying does not mean Jesus becomes nobody. It means Jesus does not cling to privilege and power for his own sake. He gives himself for others.

God is love. And love always moves beyond itself. That is why the cross becomes more than something that happened to Jesus. It becomes a pattern for Christian life. The cross is not an instruction to seek pain or allow ourselves to be abused. Rather, the cross asks: What are you willing to relinquish for the sake of another? What privilege could you share? What power could you use for someone else's good? What right to be first could you surrender? What argument could you let go? What person could you make room for?

Because the world constantly tells us to move upward. Get ahead. Protect your interests. Make sure people know your worth. Win. Be noticed. Climb the ladder. And Jesus says: There is another way. Look down. Not because the people below you are beneath you. But

because that is where love is needed. And so, we have this extraordinary reversal. Jesus goes down— and God raises him up. “Therefore, God also highly exalted him.” Jesus does not exalt himself. God does. The downward movement is ours to choose. The resurrection is God's work. I think that can help us understand the final verses: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” Paul is saying: Take seriously what God is already doing among you. Work it out. Live it out. Discover what salvation looks like in the ordinary decisions of your shared life. And notice the last word: God is at work in *you*. Not just in *me*. In *you*—plural. God is at work among this community. So we do not have to manufacture the mind of Christ through sheer effort. We receive it. We practise it. We stumble. We try again. We listen. We apologise. We forgive. We make room. And sometimes we discover that the person we thought was the problem is actually the person God is using to teach us something. And sometimes we discover that *we* are the difficult person. And that is incredibly humbling, but also strangely liberating as we discover that our life together is not about becoming impressive enough to impersonate Jesus. It is about becoming open to the Jesus already at work in us. So perhaps the question we can ask ourselves is not: “Am I humble enough?” Or: “Am I a good enough Christian?” Perhaps the question is simpler: Where is Jesus asking me to look beyond myself? Who is the person whose interests I have stopped noticing? Who is the person whose story I have never really heard? Where am I clinging to being right when love might ask me to listen? Where am I protecting my status when Jesus is inviting me to let it go? And where might God already be doing something among us that is bigger than any disagreements?

Paul begins with encouragement, love, fellowship, compassion and sympathy. And he ends with God at work. That is the gospel we need to hear. Back in Chapter 1 of Philippians Paul thanks God for the partnership, the *koinonia*, that they share. This close relationship has been formed by God and Paul speaks of it in 1 Corinthians as being shown in our sharing of Holy Communion. At the table we both show and we grow in the *koinonia* and one mind that we share. We are not a congregation because we all agree. We are not a congregation because we are naturally compatible. We are a congregation because Christ has gathered us. Christ has loved us. Christ has humbled himself for us. Christ has died and risen for us. And Christ is still at work among us. So let the mind of Christ take root in us. Let us loosen our grip on our own importance. Let us make room for difference rather than demanding sameness. Let us become people whose faith is visible not simply in what we say we believe, but in how we treat the person standing in front of us. And when we fail—and we will—let us remember that the gospel does not say: “Try harder.” It says: God is at work in you.

Perhaps, in the end, that is what having the mind of Christ means. Not thinking less of ourselves. Not pretending to be someone we are not. But becoming free enough in Christ to stop looking only at ourselves. Free enough to look around. Free enough to notice. Free enough to love. Free enough to make room. And free enough to trust that when we do, it is not finally our work at all. Because beneath all our willing, beneath all our stumbling attempts, beneath every act of kindness and every hard-won reconciliation, **God is at work in us.** Amen.

*Video of the service including the above address can be found on the St Paul's Lutheran Church Youtube page <https://www.youtube.com/@stpaulslutheranchurchboxhi1133>*

