

Philippians 2:1-13 ¹ If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, ² make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, ⁷ but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, ⁸ he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. ¹² Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Philippians 2:1-13

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“A Mind Like Jesus’ Mind”

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“There was an interesting discussion recently on the Internet about radiator caps. Yes, I said radiator caps. Stay with me for a moment. A man posted an article he had written on the Internet about an old car he once had. In his words this car was ratty and ragged, driven when he was a poor college student. He was having trouble with something he couldn't readily identify, so he took it to a repair shop. The mechanic looked at it a couple of minutes and said, "What you really need is the radiator cap solution."

"Oh," said the car's young owner, trying not to sound too confused. "Do you mean the radiator cap isn't holding enough pressure?"

"That's part of the problem," said the mechanic. "What you really need to do is you need to lift the radiator cap and drive another car under it. Then the next day you should replace the radiator cap, and that *should* solve your problem." [Story from Colorado Comments, <http://coloradocomments.com>; as used in “Needed: A Radiator Cap Solution” by King Duncan, www.Sermons.com.]

Now, I don't know how many of you have cars that need that particular solution, but Saint Paul would remind us that all of us have lives that a solution along those lines. We need to be made new. “Have the same mind in you that is in Christ Jesus,” says the Apostle. Translation: we need more than tweaking.

Interestingly, the self-improvement business in America, which includes everything was self-help books to holistic medicine to plastic surgery to diet and weight-loss programs, generated nearly 10 billion dollars in revenue in 2017 and has been on the rise every year since at least 2009. According to market research, Boomers are the biggest consumers, but Gen Xers and Millennials are gaining fast, and turning the industry towards holistic treatments, meditation, and personal training, which may be the 2nd-fastest growing industry in the world. [from <https://blog.marketresearch.com/the-10-billion-self-improvement-market-adjusts-to-new-generation>.] What that tells me is that we know we need something beyond ourselves. We need to grow, to be healthier, to reduce stress, to find our center. We need to become new people. I would say that we need the mind that was in Christ Jesus.

To have the mind that was in Christ, we must begin with Christ. That's where Paul starts. “He is not counseling the church at Philippi simply to be nice to one another even though their many

squabbles were profoundly disturbing him. He knew that "being nice" is a surface phenomenon that soon withers and dies and can even cause resentment. He longed for them to be transformed to a new creation—to have the mind of Christ as their mind. Thus he begins with Christ.” [adapted from “The Way Life Ought to Be” by King Duncan, www.Sermons.com.]

This is, perhaps, one of the best and most concise texts anywhere in scripture that give us insight into who God is in Christ Jesus. Though he was in the form of God, says Paul, he took on the form of a slave. He exchanged one form for another. “God is revealed through what God does...Christ reveals himself in his ...refusal to exploit his rights, in his self-emptying, in his self-humiliation, and in his obedience even to the point of death. And because he is ‘in the form of God’, his actions reveal not simply his own character or nature, but what God is like as well.... Christ’s exultation by God is the vindication of Christ’s actions, and not their undoing; it is precisely because he is humble and obedient that he is God.” [from *The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary, Volume XI*, “Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections” by Morna D. Hooker, (Abingdon Press, 2000) pg. 514-15] And by extension, says Paul, we ought to strive to think like Him, to be like Him.

That means, first and foremost, that we are called to be servants and to put others first. “Jerry Hoffman, a Lutheran pastor in Minneapolis, tells about hosting a guest from Japan. He sat next to her at the rehearsal dinner for the wedding of a member of their church’s staff. The staff member had been a guest in this woman’s home in Japan while making arrangements for a group of Japanese young people to spend time with members of their congregation. She had invited this woman to attend her wedding and to her surprise, she came. Pastor and Mrs. Hoffman volunteered to host her in their home after the wedding...

“When they talked to Tomeko about her impending visit in their home, her eyes lit up and she said, “Oh, let me prepare a Japanese meal for you and your guests.”

“After some courteous hesitation they agreed. At least that settled a discussion they had been having about what they might serve her.

“The day after the wedding they picked her up and stopped at the grocery store. She immediately began to load the basket with jumbo shrimp, filet and other very fine and expensive foods. About the time Pastor Hoffman was beginning to calculate how much this was going to cost, she turned and said insistently, “I pay!” She was even ready to purchase the pots and pans necessary to prepare the meal until Mrs. Hoffman assured her they had the necessary cooking utensils.

“When they arrived at home, their Japanese guest went to the guest room, returned in work clothes and literally took over the kitchen. Mrs. Hoffman attempted to help, but was soon released from her duties. About two hours later, other guests arrived. After the preliminaries, they went into the dining room, expecting that Tomeko would join them. But, she insisted that they be seated. She then served them the most fabulous Japanese meal they have ever eaten.

“In our efforts to be good hosts to a foreign guest,” says Pastor Hoffman, “we ended up being guests in our own home. This woman emptied herself, took the form of a servant and graciously served us.” Just as Jesus, who though in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant. [6 ¶s adapted from “The Second Step” by King Duncan, www.Sermons.com.]

To take on the mind of Christ means, secondly, that we are called to a ministry of encouragement. If there is any encouragement in Christ, says Paul, make my joy complete—be of the same mind. This ministry of encouragement is sometimes a challenge for us. It shouldn’t be, we think, but it really is. It is the ministry of seeing what others could do or be down the road. It is the ministry of believing in others, of readily accepting the truth that God is not finished with any of us yet, and every one of us is here for a purpose.

In the wonderful movie “October Sky” (1999) about NASA scientist Homer Hickham’s adolescence, we meet this young boy who wants to fly rockets. His father thinks he’s nuts. His mother doesn’t know what to think. His brother makes fun of him, humiliates him even. The Principal of the

high school doesn't pour too much of himself into his job because he sees all these kids as future coal miners, and nothing more. But then, there's a teacher. Miss Riley believes in these kids. She believes in their dreams. Even in their failed attempts, she sees the potential. She finds them to books to do the research and orders them. And the Principal gets on her case. She shouldn't be leading them on with false hopes and promises, to which Miss Riley responds, "I have to believe in these kids or I couldn't do this. I have to believe or I'd go out of my mind." Homar Hickham succeeds because a teacher believed in him. She didn't have a teaching job, she had a ministry of encouragement. We can do no less. Not all of us are great orators, writers, missionaries to far off lands, but any of us can build up another with a positive word.

Finally to have the mind of Christ is to become obedient. We're not so big on that either. Back in 1927 a man named Asibi, a West African native, was stricken with the deadly disease, yellow fever. However, Asibi lived. Because his system had conquered the disease, Asibi's blood contained the antibodies from which to begin to develop a successful vaccine.

Today doctors and drug companies have developed an efficient vaccine against yellow fever, and their cure has saved the lives of untold numbers of people around the world. Each dose of vaccine, though, can be traced back to one original blood sample—that of Asibi. Literally, one man's blood saved the lives of millions of people. [from Charles M. Crowe, *The Years of Our Lord* (Abingdon Press, 1955) as quoted in Robert J. Hastings, *A Word Fitly Spoken* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1962), p. 53; as used in "Cut Down Lifted Up" by King Duncan, www.Sermons.com.]

2000 years ago, another man's blood was offered to save the lives of all humanity. It was offered, not because he wanted to die, not because it was convenient or comfortable or easy, but because it was needed. Sweating drops of blood Jesus prayed, "not my will, but thine be done, Father." He became obedient, even to the point of death. Most of us will not be called to such extremes, but we are none-the-less called to obey. To give of our time, to trust in God's care, to keep walking in the fog, to stand up for what is right.

To have the mind of Christ is a tall order. "A lot of us would like to be like Tommy Lasorda, who just this year in 2020 marked his 71st year with the Dodgers Organization. Back when he was still managing the team, Lasorda accepted a fee to wear a certain shoe when the Dodgers were in the World Series. Then another manufacturer made a similar offer, and now he had a problem. How could he wear both? He thought maybe he could wear one brand at home and the other on the road and get two fees, but neither company would go for that. Finally, he figured out a way to get both fees. He simply wore one shoe from each manufacturer.

"Some of us would like to follow the same tactic in dividing our allegiance between Christ and the world. It cannot be done. If, as St. Paul instructs, we have the mind of Christ in us, we cannot at the same time have the mind of the world." [2 ¶s from Joe Garagiola, *It's Anybody's Ballgame*, (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1988); as used in "Cut Down Lifted Up" by King Duncan, www.Sermons.com.] We cannot be a servant only when it is convenient. We cannot offer encouraging words only when we're in a good mood, or only to the ones who love us, or only to the ones who 'deserve' it.

Lately, I've been asking myself what it means to take on Christ's mine in the middle of a pandemic, when racial tensions are higher than they've been since the 1960s, and the battle over the Supreme Court is highlighting the disparities in health insurance and the pro-life/pro-choice divide. And I'm increasingly convinced that we don't make space anymore for real conversation – not in government, not in news-media, and perhaps not even in education anymore. Our attention is focused on sides and on winning points and on despising the "other". But the truth is: I don't think any of us want innocent people to die. Not black men just out for a jog. Not police officers just doing their job. Not people who are sick with cancer or heart disease or Covid-19. Not fetuses. Or mothers. Or soldiers. Or immigrants fleeing despair and suffering. But somehow, all of those things have become fault lines in our society. That to care about some of those things by default means we can't care about the others. If I say that black lives matter, why does that mean that blue lives don't? If I say that

healthcare is a human right, why does that mean I don't value local business? If I want autonomy over my own body, why does that mean I approve of abortion? Why is it that Americans aren't willing to have these conversation? Why do we settle for bumper sticks and Facebook memes when the issues are so much deeper and more complex? What is it our human minds that refuses to see one another's humanity? That's afraid of hard conversations? That must be angry in order to motivated? Sociologists say we are more divided, more fearful, and more hateful than almost any other time in US history. In this day and age, what does it mean to take on the mind of Christ? What would that look like? It's more than servanthood, encouragement, or obedience – I know that much. I didn't know how to put it into words until I saw a post from a colleague earlier this week. His name is JJ Mannschreck and he's serving over in Flushing. This week, he wrote this:

I have no idea what God is doing in the world right now.

But I can feel the pieces moving.

Does that make sense?

*I can't shake this feeling like He knows what He's doing
even if it just looks like chaos to me.*

Feeling oddly hopeful today.

They're simple words, really. But they made me realize how small, how bitter and angry, how ugly my world can become when I don't open my mind to the shaping of Jesus Christ. To take on the mind of Christ is to see beyond this slice of history. And by see beyond, I don't mean that I become clairvoyant where the future is concerned. Rather, it means I allow my heart to trust in the One who sees, who shapes, who works – the One (the only One) who can lift up the radiator cap and drive a new person underneath—the person God means for us each to be. May the Lord make it so. Amen.