Full Accord and of One Mind

Philippians 2:1-11 2020

Philippians 2:1-11 (NRSV)

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

 Welcome to our Palm Sunday virtual worship service,

 as we are celebrating the beginning of Holy Week

 when Jesus rode into Jerusalem.

When I imagine the scene that day,

 the noise of the excited crowd shouting “hosanna” & waving palms…

 … what a glorious and wonderful experience that must have been.

So too I’ve always enjoyed the procession of our children and youth

 waving their palms to the inspiring & joyful music of Palm Sunday …

 … there is something powerful about being part of a large crowd.

Pause for a moment to think back, and try to remember and visualize

 a particularly powerful and inspiring worship experience,

 one of those energizing gatherings when your spirit soared.

It was probably at a huge worship gathering

 with hundreds of people all singing joyfully together,

 maybe some of your favorite hymns sung especially well,

 with dear friends who are significant in your life.

 **And what was it about that worship experience and music**

 **that made it so inspiring and meaningful and wonderful?**

 Theologically and socio-locally it has something to do with

 lots of people all singing something meaningful together…

 … and that those many voices blending in harmony

 somehow helps produce a glorious experience of worship

 that is so much more

 than just the sum of their individual voices.

**Something special happens when we all lift up our hearts together**

 **with our voices to praise, honor and celebrate our glorious Lord…**

 **… and we know instinctively that such grand worship**

 **is way more than just a musical event or experience.**

\* Actually when the people of God sing praise together that way

 our voices blended in harmony **helps express our unity in Christ**

 which is an important & critical focus of Reformed theology.

One of the principle concerns and deficiencies

 that the Protestant Reformation was intending to correct

 was that medieval Roman Catholic worship, the mass,

 was performed almost entirely by the priest alone,

 and the congregation was reduced to mere spectators

 watching, with very little sense of active participation.

In contrast to performers doing all the worship for an audience,

 the early Reformers put tremendous emphasis

 on congregational spoken responses and singing together.

 In fact, both Martin Luther and John Calvin are responsible

 for several hymns that we still sing from time to time…

… because more than just the theology of the music itself,

 they were convinced that when we sing together,

 that as we listen and blend our voices together in worship,

 it expresses & builds up our Christian fellowship and unity.

The many voices singing in harmony are a powerful and visible sign

 and a reminder that **all are loved, precious and called by God**,

 and that **we all have something meaningful to contribute**,

 and that we are one in community by the faith we share,

 with all of us focused on our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Even singing off-key with a less than perfect voice and pitch

 still contributes in a significant way to faithful worship

With a solo artist, however wonderful and beautifully they sing,

 there is an inherent focus on that person’s voice and skill,

 that is different and **less communal** than

 the blended harmony of congregational singing…

The passage we read from Paul’s letter to the Philippians

 proclaims that same sense of a **communal theology**,

 of everyone listening and blending their voices

 by singing the same music together in harmony…

**… with our focus entirely on Jesus instead of our differences.**

In the ancient world,

 there was considerable emphasis on social status

 and the rights and privileges due to one’s position.

The city of Philippi was a privileged and favored colony of Rome.

 Its citizens were very conscious of that elevated status,

 and some brought that cultural-perspective into the Church…

… which lead to conflict, jealousies and disagreements among them…

 … so Paul urges them, vs. 1-2

 If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Paul’s point was, **that if**

 their faith was authentic and actually meant something,

 **then they** **must** cooperate and be united in their faith.

**And if there is anything**

 **that will give you the strength, courage and support you need,**

 **it will come from the faith we share in Jesus Christ**

 by listening and blending our lives together in harmony.

By this, Paul isn’t saying that we all have to agree on everything,

 or that we all must share the same ideas and opinions,

 but as Christians, surely the most important truth in life

 is that God loves us and through Jesus we are healed and saved.

**That single and most critical truth unites all Christians,**

 **and to follow Jesus as his disciples makes that our life’s priority**

 **and not all that other stuff that can distract and divide us.**

So Paul is urging the Christians in Philippi **to focus on Christ**--

 - to be of one mind, by following the life and teaching of Jesus…

… as he writes, vs. 5-8

 Let **the same mind be in you that was in Christ** Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but **emptied himself**, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and **became obedient** to the point of death— even death on a cross.

**So what was the example of Jesus Christ?, or the “mind of Christ”?**

 It was humble servanthood and compassion, in contrast

 to the status-seeking and self-promotion of their world.

**In contrast to the status conscious culture around them,**

 **be a community of grace, one that reflects Jesus Christ.**

The lesson is that Jesus surrendered his power and status as God,

 accepting the status of human flesh, even dying a slave’s death…

 **… his whole life submitted to the Father’s will & purpose-**

- and from that example, Paul is urging the Philippian Christians

 to surrender their ego-status, their rights and desires,

 by trying to cooperate and get along for the benefit of all—

 which is to serve together to build-up the Kingdom of God,

 **and allow God to use us to be a blessing toward others.**

Next, Paul points out, how God vindicated and glorified

 the obedient, self-denying sacrifice of Jesus, vs. 9-11

 Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

 Those words and that image, “every knee and every tongue”

 come from a promise that was given through Isaiah

 toward the end of the Babylonian exile and captivity.

It was a very discouraging time for the Jewish people.

 They had been defeated and scattered all over the world,

 and they were questioning God, God’s reign and power.

**Their world didn’t look much like God was really in charge.**

The prophet responds by reassuring the people, Isaiah 45:22-23

 Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return: “To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.”

As Paul explains, drawing from that Isaiah passage,

 the victory of the Lord’s will and purpose, **these are certain**,

 and every knee shall bow, every tongue will confess it.

 Building on that, the message to the Philippians,

 was to focus on Jesus, by having the mind of Christ,

 by making their attitude consistent with

 the life, the teaching and example of Jesus.

 And in humility, set aside their selfish desires and rights,

 so that God can accomplish the Kingdom through them…

**… which is always an appropriate lesson for the Church.**

That is an especially important and critical message to hear now –

 - for right now not much feels very safe or secure or certain,

 and it feels like normal is still a very long way off…

… though I bet when we are through and emerge from this experience,

 we will have a renewed & deeper appreciation for public worship.

But we are having to learn to live in a vastly different context,

 and for those following the guidelines of staying home and safe,

 we need to focus on Jesus now more than ever,

 to avoid letting loose our fear and frustration

 on loved ones who are also stuck with us at home…

or as Paul wrote, vs. 1-2, 5

 If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.

**God loves us, and want us to know him and to live into that grace,**

 **for then we can truly love the Lord with all our heart & strength**

 **from which extravagant gratitude and love will surely flow.**

 During this week, Holy week look for an opportunity

 to simply reach out, and reflect God's love for this world…

… perhaps pray with someone (phone), call a shut-in, greet a stranger,

 refuse to get angry, to express frustration, or take offence…

… and **let God's love and mercy guide our affections, words & actions,**

 **toward a more whole, hopeful and joyful presence in this world.**

Also for this Holy Week, I recommend trying to read the Passion story

 in one or read it in all four of the Gospels- we’ve got the time!

 Then, pray and consider what it means to you,

 and let that be your spiritual guide this week.

Through the Prophet Jeremiah God assures us (31:3)

 I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.

 And so surely, “Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

1. Isaac Watts, 1656 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)