

The Mind We Have Among Ourselves

THE 17th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, Proper 21

October 1, 2017

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-18

¹ So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ² complete my joy by being 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 count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in Heaven and on Earth and under the Earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. ¹²

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. ¹⁴ Do all things without grumbling or disputing, ¹⁵ that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, ¹⁶ holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. ¹⁷ Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. ¹⁸ Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

The Apostle tells the church in Philippi,

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.

[Philippians 2:5]

Jesus, who is true God, spends no effort in building himself up, not considering equality with God a thing to be grasped.

Jesus, who acted not from selfish ambition or conceit, looked at the sinner, looked at those who had nothing to offer to God, and he counted them as significant, even counting them as more significant than himself.

Jesus, who emptied himself out for those he loves, became like them in human flesh, though with no sin, and gave himself over to humiliation when he was baptized with them in the Jordan, joining himself to them in all their sin. For them to whom he had joined himself in baptism, he bowed down to death on their behalf, even willingly going to the death offered by the cross.

Have this mind—this mind of Jesus—among yourselves, says Paul. And in writing this to the Philippians, Paul is writing it to a Church which often does not have this mind among themselves, but another mind.

Which makes sense. For whenever you get two or three people together, they have a mind among themselves. This Greek word Paul uses here for “mind” is a word referring to the common conversation a group of people have among themselves. In its root word, it refers to the diaphragm of a body. So it speaks of the words produced by the voice; it speaks of the conversation a body expresses, even from its deepest parts, from its diaphragm.

When a group of people are together, they express their common conversation. The question is, what kind? What kind of “mind” among themselves belongs to the group? It can be bad, it can be good.

If a bunch of people are grouped together at, for instance, a football game, you can guess what their common conversation will be. It will be about football. It will be shouting for the team and yelling for victory.

If a bunch of people gather themselves in a group for something vile, then you can guess what their mind together will be. It will be a conversation of malice. If a group of people wants to push racial division, or hatred against neighbor, then we know what the conversation is which they will have among themselves.

On the other hand, if people are in a group to help their neighbor, then you can guess what their mind together will be. If they join with each other to bring unity where there is division, to help, perhaps, in relief from a flood, then we know what the conversation among them will sound like—it will be healthy, it will be to build-up and encourage.

In Philippi, the conversation in the Church wasn't good. That's why Paul is writing to them.

Philippi is in northern Greece. It's a proud city. It's named after Philip II of Macedonia, who happens to be the father to Alexander the Great, who conquered the known world. So you don't find any greater pride than you will find in a Macedonian from Philippi.

But that was a few generations earlier. Now Philippi is a Roman colony. It has been conquered by Rome, it's occupied by Roman troops and officers, they have confiscated all the great estates, making the Philippian Greeks their servants, and you don't find any greater pride than you will find in a conquering Roman.

Which is a problem in the Church. Each week the Church is gathered to hear the Gospel and receive the Lord's Supper together. Each week you have Philippian Greeks who have lost their great city to the Romans gathering alongside Roman soldiers to receive the Body and Blood of the Living Christ.

And we can guess what the mind is they have among themselves. It is a mind of pride and despising of others, a mind of selfish ambition and conceit, a mind of people of different states and languages considering themselves to be of more importance than others; it is a mind of discrimination and retribution among people.

Yet, they all belong to the Lord, both the Greek and the Roman. They have all been baptized into Christ Jesus. They, all of them, stand before God to confess their sins and to receive the salvation of his redeeming blood. That's life in the Church.

So, says Paul, "***have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.***"

And these holy words written by the Apostle are brought by the Holy Spirit to the Church of every place and every generation, so that we may hear them, so that these words would be brought into our conversation and would form up the mind we have with one another. That's what it means that these words are in Holy Scripture to be heard and confessed by the Church of every place and every generation.

For the Church will always have in it the pride of the Romans and the desire for retribution of the Philippians. The Church will always have in it the division among peoples, the self-ambition, self-importance, and the conceit and envy which tear the Church apart. The Church will always have this not because this is part of the Church, it is not. Not because Jesus has brought it into his Body the Church, he has not. But because the Church is a gathering together of sinners into one body.

And where there are sinners, there is sin. So, that Philippi had this conversation of sin among them, this mind of retribution and pride, this didn't surprise Paul one bit. Could it be otherwise? Gather together a bunch of sinners and you then find them sinning against each other—is that surprising? It's no more surprising than gathering a bunch of pigeons, and then finding a mess on your windshield.

It's not that the Apostle is shocked or surprised. But he does want to bring to these Christians in Philippi a gift. To their conversation of placing themselves over one another, to the mind they have among themselves of holding on to sins against each other, Paul brings the gift of the mind of Christ. It is the conversation of humility and forgiveness: ***have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.***

This is the conversation that cleanses us. It forgives our sin. It let's us give the gift of forgiveness to one another. And it binds us together as the Body of Christ, now having among us the mind of Christ.

This is the conversation given to us by the One who, though he is true God, did not count that something to be grasped, but he emptied himself out for those he loves, for us.

He did not count himself more significant than us, but he held us up as his people and counted us as more important than even himself.

He did not choose to hold onto our sins and keep us covered in our shame, but he emptied himself out on our behalf and humbled himself by riding into Jerusalem on the back of a lowly donkey, in order to willingly bow down to death, even to death on a cross.

In this, The Father has highly exalted him. Exalted him not because of his power, not because of a glory

of conquering armies, but because of his humiliation on the cross on behalf of us.

In this the Father has highly exalted him. And, in exalting him, the Father exalts also all those who belong to him, all those bearing his Name.

The Father, in his Son, Christ Jesus, has highly exalted you and me and our children, our brothers and sisters in this congregation, and our brothers and sisters in the Church throughout the world.

Our brothers and sisters now humiliated, persecuted, and martyred by the Muslims in northern Africa—they belong to Christ, they are exalted.

The brother struggling to find a job, the sister in the faith crying over a hurting child, the husband and wife in conflict with one another? They all belong to Christ.

We all belong to Christ Jesus. That's the promise of Baptism. And he brings us all, along with those Christians in Philippi, into the communion of his Body and Blood. And the mind he gives us among ourselves is his mind, his conversation—his conversation of the Gospel. It's the speaking of sins-forgiven and shame removed, of encouragement and comfort.

This is conversation is his gift, and it is the cleansing of our consciences; it is him building us up together, joining us together into the oneness his Body, the Church.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.