

What Does It Mean to Have the Mindset of Christ?

Palm Sunday, 2023

Sixth in a Series of Seven Sermons, “Questions of Lent”

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.

Dear Christian Friends,

Some of you may remember a CBS television show named Undercover Boss, which aired ten or so years ago. Each episode featured a CEO or a highly placed executive of a company humbling him or herself by changing appearance, assuming an alias, and a fictional life story. The CEO would spend approximately one week undercover, working in a variety of entry level jobs. **The** mindset of the undercover bosses was twofold: 1) to discover and correct the faults of that company, and 2) to reward workers who were doing well.

Our Lenten Sunday sermon series has as its title, “Questions of Lent.” Last Sunday we explored God asking the prophet Ezekiel, “Can dead bones live?” Two Sundays ago - Two Sundays ago - the disciples asking Jesus, “Why was this man born blind - his sin or his parents’ sin?” Three Sundays ago - the family of Abram asking, “Where are we going? And How much farther?” Four Sundays ago - Moses asking the complainers, “Why do you quarrel with me? And asking God, “What should I do with these people?” Five Sundays ago, God asking Adam, “Where are you? And Who told you that you’re naked?”

And in all of these narratives and throughout human history, God is asking one simple question, “Will you trust me?”

Today’s question is “What does it mean to have the mindset of Christ?”

There are a lot of ways we could answer that question, but today we’re going to answer it in the context of Paul’s letter to the early Christians in Philippi. You may be surprised to learn that the background of this letter was that two ladies named Euodia and Synteche were quarreling and their quarreling was threatening

to destroy the unity of the entire congregation. We don't know whether the spat was about something petty or major, but we can be sure that there was a fair measure of pride and stubbornness that was at the heart of the division.

In our text for today, Paul is declaring that wherever there is division, the pathway out of that division, the pathway to peace is for those who are divided to **do nothing out of rivalry or conceit but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. It is to look not only to our own interests, but also to the interests of others.** Or to say it another way, it is to have the mindset of Christ inside of us. Three truths we learn today about the mindset of Christ, and a story to go along with each truth.

Truth #1 about having the mindset of Christ is to daily renounce the enemies of the faith. It's hard for Lutherans to hear the word "renounce" without thinking of the Baptism liturgy where Godparents and parents and congregations pledge to help that little one spend her life renouncing the devil and all of his works and all of his ways. Or to think of the Rite of Confirmation, where freshly scrubbed and white robed teenagers pledge to be diligent in the use of the means of grace and spend the rest of their lives renouncing that same devil with all of his nasty works and devious ways. To renounce is to say, "I'm serious about doing battle."

We can be sure that before the foundations of the world were laid, the Son of God had made a decision to do battle with the forces of darkness. He decided that when the fullness of time had arrived. He would be conceived by the Holy Spirit, He would be born of a woman, He would live under the Law, He would suffer under Pontius Pilate, He would be crucified until He was dead and buried. In keeping with the first recorded promise of a Savior in Genesis 3:15, Jesus had made the decision to not hold onto His equality with God. He in whom the fullness of deity dwelled would empty himself, He would take on the nature of a servant, He would give up the right to his rights.

I didn't say that the Son of God would give up His rights. He would give up the right to fully use his rights. He didn't give up his deity, he emptied himself of the full expression of that deity. He poured himself out, like taking a bucket and pouring out its contents, so there was nothing left inside.

For what purpose? So that He could be our Redeemer, our Rescuer, and our Deliverer. So that we could be His own, live under Him in His Kingdom, and spend our lives thanking and praising, serving and obeying. For the joy of living face to face with countless saints in heaven, for eternity.

The kingdom of God is like a narcotics squad that raided an upstairs apartment in a depressed part of New York City. They walked on a scene of unbelievable filth and squalor. The apartment was crowded with drug addicts and folks down and out on their luck. Among those arrested was the host, who turned out to be the owner of the apartment. At police headquarters, this bearded and mild mannered man claimed to be a millionaire who had chosen to live among these homeless drug addicts for the purpose of providing them with food and shelter. It turns out that he was telling the truth. He had renounced a wealthy lifestyle and was more interested in the needs of others than his own.

Truth #2 about having the mindset of Christ is be faithful to the vows we have taken in Baptism and in the Rite of Confirmation.

We don't know whether those two women, Euodia and Synteche in Philippi, figured out a way to settle their disagreement. We can only hope that they read Paul's letter, that they were able to back up and give their situation another look. We can only hope that they were able to look each other in the eyes, to listen to what the other was saying, to admit what they could have done better, and to forgive as they had already been forgiven. We can only hope that from that day forward, they would live in such a way that others would be attracted to their little congregation and not driven away.

We do know exactly how Christ solved the disagreement between God Almighty and the forces of darkness. We know that he went like a lamb to the slaughter, we know that it wasn't at all about his will but the will of his father, we know that he drank every last drop of a cup overflowing with a righteous God's wrath, we know that He was able to be tempted in every way that we are and yet without sin, we know that he was able to submit to the governing authorities in a way that would attract all nations to his cross for generations to come, we know that he was able to humble himself in a perfect way day after day before the mighty hand of God, that he could be exalted in due time.

In the early days of the 19th century, a wealthy plantation owner was drawn to the heartbreaking sobs of a slave girl who was about to be auctioned off. He proceeds to buy her at a very high price for the purpose of setting her free. When the auction was over, the clerk came to the sobbing girl and handed her her own bill of sale. He explained that she was free to go her own way. She responded by begging the clerk to help her find the man who had bought her. She insisted that she wanted to find him and serve him as long as she lived.

Over the first 40 years of my ministry, I estimate that I was privileged to be a pastor to 800 or so teenagers preparing for the Confirmation Vow. And I would often remind them in their confirmation day sermon that they had been bought at a high price. Not with gold nor silver nor cash nor credit cards had they been purchased, but with holy precious blood. With innocent suffering and death of their Savior, they had been set free. I urged them, and I urge every one of you here today, in response to Jesus Christ buying your freedom at an unimaginably high price, to spend the rest of your days being faithful to those confirmation vows, or to say it another way - to spend the rest of your days bending your knees at the name of Jesus and confessing that He is Lord.

Truth #3 about having the mindset of Christ is to know that our stories all have happy endings.

For Jesus, the happy ending included descending into hell and proclaiming victory over the spirits kept in prison. It included rising up from the grave on the 3rd day, ascending into heaven on the 40th day, baptizing the Church with His Spirit on the 50th day, and sitting at the right hand of His Father every day until His return.

For the congregation at Philippi, the happy ending included knowing that Christ was near and that the joy of salvation could be theirs in every circumstance of life.

For Christians of all generations, our happy endings include the daily confession of our sins, at which time the grace of God sweeps over our collective souls and all of heaven breaks out in celebration. They include eating and drinking at our Lord's Supper, where Jesus holds us close, and the stains of our sins are washed away in the blood of the Lamb. They include laying our heads on our pillows each night, resting in the simple truth that God's love for us is deep, and it's wide, and it's long, and it's personal, and it's forever.

The kingdom of God is like a congregation of believers full of folks who have their bad days, their good days, and their really good days.

On their bad days, they look to their own interests above all else. Their good intentions go awry, and they just sort of wander aimlessly through the day.

On their good days, they make the sign of the cross, they confess their sins before their God, and the peace of God stands guard over their hearts and souls.

On their really good days, they help and befriend and serve others in such a way that God gets all kinds of glory. In Jesus' Name. Amen.