



# “At The Name Of Jesus”

a sermon by

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As we have been studying the life and movement of the early church in the book of Acts since Easter, and have been taking up the many ways the resurrected Christ had a ripple effect upon the faith community, communities of Jews and Gentiles, as well as on individuals. I felt it was only appropriate to have our closing word for this Wednesday Worship season come from the Apostle Paul, who is perhaps best noted for his encouragement of those communities who struggled to live faithfully into discipleship in Christ. We have taken up his conversion and his arguments before the Athenians, and while there is much to highlight among his missionary journeys which alone comprise the latter chapters of the book of Acts, we will hear from his letter to his beloved church at Philippi.

Our text comes from Philippians 2:1-11. "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."

It was Round Three in the Property Committee meeting in my old church. Tempers flared, passions blazed. Arguments ranging from the practical to the theological staked their claim on both sides of the issue. I say it was Round Three because it was the third time in as many months that this issue that would surely make or break the standing of the church in the community was being taken up. The argument - filled with social, political, and ecclesiastical implications - was over the positioning of a new Coke machine. Should it be in the side entry lobby separating the educational building from the worship space, or in the staff office area? Each as poignant a location as the other, proponents of each option in equal need of refreshment. After months of debate the issue was finally decided - and three people left the church.

We don't know what hot issue had broken out in the church in Philippi. It was generally a strong and healthy congregation but the letter suggests there was something divisive stewing just beneath the surface of the praise songs. As we all know, in the life and politics within the church and without, it is easy to lose sight of what it is exactly that we are doing here. To forget what it is that we as Christians are called to be. But rather than take a hard line with the Philippians and chiding them for some failure of their sensibilities or lack of faith, Paul builds on what he knows they already have: encouragement in Christ, consolation from love, sharing in the Spirit, compassion, and sympathy. And he exhorts them in love. "If then there are any of these things, 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.

Sure, Paul, we'll do - but where should we put the Coke machine? It would seem that Paul was delivering little assistance here - a word of support to a community that probably needed solutions. Strong encouragement when they wanted strong arguments. I know I at least have often wanted these clear directions from my Bible or church, and have received something quite different more often than not. But then, he delivers the punch line - Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. I would think in today's world that this would translate into a God complex. But, the case is actually quite the contrary.

Paul answers the bickering and petty squabbles among believers in their day-to-day struggle to live out their discipleship by calling them back to the root of their faith, the root that changes everything. "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus" - and the words that follow are some of the most famous in his writings, the words of what is believed to have been a Christian hymn - a hymn written before Paul's time that sings to us the story of a man "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."

For the past nine months we have gathered here on Wednesdays to return to the root of our faith - to be called back to our discipleship, to be reminded that we are to be of the same mind as Jesus. To recall that we bear the imprint of the textbook for discipleship upon our hearts by virtue of the fact that the Holy Spirit, that same Spirit of Jesus, is alive and well within us.

And so Paul does not speak of impossibilities or utopias when he suggests we regard all others as better than ourselves, but tells of a reality we are to emulate not just because it is what our 'what would Jesus do' bracelet requires of us, but because it is part of a larger reality of grace and salvation that was enacted for us, and so we, too, are called to carry out. In short, Paul tells us quite simply to be what we have been given - encouragement in Christ, consolation in love, sharing in the Spirit, compassion and sympathy, the mind of Christ. It is no secret that this is a great work of faith. For it means taking on the mind of Christ not just in arguments over Coke machines, but in the way you chose to live and speak and act and treat every single person around you each and every day.

It means speaking out when the theological gives way to the practical, when integrity crumbles under the weight of popularity, when 'a closer walk with thee' is being sacrificed to the attitude of 'all for me,' it means that self-giving cannot be subordinate to self-consciousness. No, conforming to the mind of Christ is no small task in a world that thinks quite differently. Protestant Reformer Martin Luther had spent four years stirring up much trouble with his sermons and writings against the Roman Catholic church and their sale of indulgences - grace for hire, when in 1521 he appeared before a council that represented the full power of the church and the state, and faced the threat of being burned at the stake as a heretic.

When a pile of his books were placed before the council and he was instructed to recant all that he had written, he replied, "Unless I am convinced by proofs from Scriptures or by plain and clear reasons and arguments, I can and will not retract, for it is neither safe nor wise to do anything against conscience. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen."

It is this resolute confidence in Christ and the proclamation of his name that Paul calls the Philippians to, and that Christians ever since have wrestled to uphold often over and against the power of the world. For Christ did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, being born in human likeness. But the story does not end with Christ's humility alone. It ends with all that is in heaven and on earth and under the earth bowing down at the name of Jesus.

It ends with the promise that echoes in Paul's other letters, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all of creation can separate us from the love of God. In short, it ends with the promise that Christ has the final word over all else and so we need not be afraid.

What this means for us is that all this talk of being of the mind of Christ, and doing nothing of selfish ambition, and looking to the interests of others is made possible because everything else in heaven and on earth and under the earth bows at the name of Jesus. Do not be mistaken, just because there is talk of grace in this gospel does not mean that there isn't some serious power and glory going on here - in this name Jesus - so much so that there can be strength even in such things as weakness; power in brokenness; exaltation in humility.

The name of Jesus is so potent that everything else that has power over humankind, over the community of faith, over each of us at work, and in our lives every day bends a knee to the name of Jesus and is ultimately rendered powerless. Every fear that cripples us, each decision that binds us up, every insecurity that prevents us from loving our neighbor more fully, each troubled memory that haunts us or ghost that stalks us, every institution that tells us to conform to its ways, very bottom line that drives our thinking pales in comparison to the name of Jesus.

The name that is above every name. And so we who profess this name are freed up to have in us the same mind that was in Christ Jesus because, believe it or not, in humility and love and self-offering we are exalted because everything else has been humbled by our Lord and therefore we can claim the confidence of life in Christ if only we would have the courage to live it.

This summons to our faith, this hymn of praise, has been transposed into our closing hymn of this season of worship we have enjoyed. Though songs of a major key tend to inspire a comfort and closure that would be appropriate for an afternoon such as this, this passage has made its way into the minor key- giving a sense of boldness, and of being incomplete.

This is by design. Because the work of Christ in this world is never complete. We are not allowed to ride through the days and months ahead complacent in our faith, but are challenged each and every day to conform to the mind of Christ, which means it may be a pretty uncomfortable summer at times if we can step with confidence into those difficult situations and be a light for Christ to the world.

But just as the work of Christ in this world is never complete but is perpetuated in us, we can walk forward in confidence, that so, too, do all powers never cease to bend to the name of

Jesus until the day when every tongue should confess him as Lord. This will be accomplished through the work of the Spirit in each of us who will confess our faith, and the counter-cultural gospel of humility to a hungry world by saying, "Here I stand. I can do no other. So help me God."

"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." Amen.