

Humble Mind of Christ
Philippians 2:1-13
Witness

Peace Presbyterian Church
Peacemaking/Global

Elizabeth M. Deibert

1 October 2017

Page | 1

It is good to be with you again in worship, after two weeks away and one hurricane. How good it is to be part of a congregation that loves one another and cares for the world. Today we celebrate World Communion, a concept initiated by Shadyside Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh in 1933. The idea spread rapidly to other denominations after the National Council of Churches emphasized it during the strife of WW2. This notion of Christian unity across denominations and cultures and nations has grown so much and so well, that as we prepare to celebrate the 500 year of the Protestant Reformation, we no longer have a desire to emphasize what divides us, but to focus on what unifies us. We are a more humble church, seeing with greater clarity how through the years, we have mixed colonialism with faith, racism with faith, and nationalism with faith. We have killed one another in the effort to “purify” the faith, and that is a great sorrow. We have wounded one another by the confusion in our minds between what we want and what Christ wants. If we are going to be peacemakers, caring for brothers and sisters around the world, we need mind of Christ to compassion and deep regard for others. Hear now these beautiful words of Paul to the young church in Philippi, words which from verse 5 include one of the earliest hymns sung or chanted in the church.

Philippians 2:1-13

¹If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, ²make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, ⁷but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, ⁸he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.

⁹Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

¹²Therefore, 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; ¹³for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Paul challenges the Philippians with rhetorical statements. If this faith has meant something to do, if you had any encouragement or consolation or sharing or sympathy or compassion, make my joy complete: be unified, join hands, love one another and move forward together.

Wow, do we need this message of unity in our culture today. In humility regard others as better than yourselves. The bickering and biting words, the selfish ambitions and conceit are clearly going nowhere, except to destroy all of us. In humility regard others as better than yourselves. Humility is not self-deprecating, self-loathing, self-doubt, or begging for self-assurance from others because of your insecurities. Humility arises from a strong security in who you are, so that you can boldly care for others. It starts with a desire to understand. It begins with a commitment to listening even to the point of being very uncomfortable.

To understand another person means that I don't care just about what they say but about why they say and do what they do. It means I cannot presume to know what it is like to be you, instead of me. So I humbly ask and listen carefully.

What we have going on in our country - these vicious weekly debates on Twitter, FB and all kinds of media is a violent storm of reactions, with very few people thinking creatively about what lies underneath. Only the very thoughtful and kind, the secure and Christ-like people, are stopping to think carefully about the other, seeking to understand another's perspective.

So I'm not going to viciously attack President Trump, even though I often vehemently disagree with how he treats other people. For that's just doing to him what I say he should not do to others. And I AM going to listen to the reasons people have for kneeling for the national anthem, rather than accuse people of being disrespectful, because I am seeking to go deeper in understanding race and sympathetic about what it means to grow up feeling unprotected or disrespected because of skin color.

On this day of peacemaking and world communion, we are called to have the mind of Christ, who though he was God, did not cling to that superiority, but humbled himself to be just like us, to understand us, to unite us with God. He came fully into our life, and loved all people so completely, that it was disturbing to those who lived another way - according to the harsh rules of power, classism, greed, and religious legalism. But Jesus Christ, emptied himself of all that, and was willing to be weak, poor, vulnerable, and wounded for our sakes, so that he could feel our pain. And he did not just walk this lonesome valley of troubled life with us, he triumphed over it and the death it deals us. We have died with him, and therefore will live with him. But dying to self, living for others is not easy.

Awareness of God's all-embracing love is the first step. The degree to which we can empty ourselves, die with him from the fear, the jealousy, the envy, the anger, the greed, the self-absorption that blinds us and binds us, the more we can receive the fullness of Christ's mind into our mind. Then our mind becomes expansive. It has room for others. It is flexible and active, open to new people and new ideas and new ways of understanding. It is also gracious and forgiving, able to move on past

failures, both ours and theirs, because we know love covers a multitude of sins.

When we have the mind of Christ, a humble mind, we know that our experience is not the only normative experience, that the experience of others is just as valid as ours. Then we are not afraid to step into their shoes, connect with their pain and bring to it the light of God by our gracefulness. Then we can listen to others, even if it feels like criticism. Then we can listen to others, even if they question what we believe. Then we can listen to others, even if they seem disrespectful. Even if they are out of control, we are not, because we are so full of the love of Christ in our minds that all we care about is a genuine loving relationship with this other person, who is equally made in God's image. It's not about being a people-pleaser, but a God-pleaser, treating the person as Christ would.

Then we can have healthy boundaries with others, knowing that their baggage is their baggage, and we cannot and should not try to "fix" them. Only God can heal, but God can use us like sticky antibiotic ointment and band-aids to cover wounds. Only God can heal, but God can use us like adoring grandparents and loyal pets and great teachers and BFFs, whose loving support can be trusted.

A beautiful example is this humble love of God is seen in the Orthodox Jewish student at New College in Sarasota, Matthew Stevenson, who when he learned of the identity of classmate Derek Black, son of white supremacist, Don Black and godson of David Duke, began to invite him regularly to Shabbat meals and to build a friendship with him. Matthew decided his best chance to affect Derek's thinking was not to ignore him or confront him, but simply to include him. "Maybe he'd never spent time with a Jewish person before," Matthew thought. This friendship eventually led to Derek's conversion from hatred to love. When we see weakness or evil in another, we can find constructive and humble ways to deal with it, praying and working for the others, challenging them to become their best self.

There have been many times in my life as a pastor, as a parent, a spouse, a sister, a daughter, and a friend, that I have been the unsuspecting recipient of a person's irritability, irrational rage, misunderstanding, mistreatment, impatience, rudeness, disrespect ...Do I need to keep going or do you know what I am talking about because you have experienced it too? By the way, do you know the difference between the irrational rage of a three year old, a thirteen year-old and a middle-aged person? Do you? Not much - just a broader vocabulary. We've experienced it, and we've dished it out a few times too on undeserving friends and family members. But here's the thing: To be Christ-like is to find a healthy, non-reactive way of dealing with stress.

As I was writing this, I realized that the word creative and reactive have exactly the same letters, but they are ordered differently. I wonder if you might pause this week and consider how to make your reactive moments turn into creative ones by putting compassion, caring, and concern for the other person first. When the c's come first, you are creative. Sometimes being creative is humor at the right moment, sometimes it is taming the tongue at the right moment. Sometimes it is finding a good question to dive deeper into how the other person feels, instead of just thinking about how you feel. Creative is expansive and open to possibilities, while reactive is closed off and unable to hope for more. Creative is generous, while reactive is tit-for-tat.

And the paradox is this: We cannot make ourselves into the people we need to be. That's God's work. But God cannot save/heal/make us whole without our cooperation in the process. So let us continually empty our minds of so much angst and ego, and let us actively put on the mind of Christ, clothing ourselves in Christ, so with room for the fullness of Christ's love, we'll have a reservoir of respect for others.