

### **Philippians 2:1-13**

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

#### **“God at Work in You”**

For an early church community founded by Paul, the Philippians get high marks in the Christian living category. They pray for Paul, they've supplied for his needs, they've even undergone persecution for the sake of the gospel. Paul gives thanks many times for them in his letter and writes that he hopes to visit them soon. The church in Philippi was for Paul, like an honors level class is to a teacher. They attend to their homework without much checking up on and you can push and challenge them a little more! The Spirit was moving within the community, even against opposition to the gospel and in Paul's long absence. Yet Paul knows these disciples have much to learn about living in Christ. There are ALWAYS deeper levels of response to God and broader ways for Christians to live in Christ. The Philippians are ready for the next challenge of faith; to live “firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel.”

A whole community striving side by side with one mind? Paul often seems like a pie in the sky kind of guy! Our text is no exception. His hope is clear, “be of the same mind.” Yet it is difficult to know how we are to carry out this hope in our common life.

All of the background I read on our text interpreted this passage's practical call in nearly the same way. Buried within Paul's call to us, at the beginning and end of the text, is an ancient hymn. We find guidance for possessing a common mind there in the hymn. I found though that I needed a big stick to help me wade through the scholars' comments on Paul's theological and ethical theories to decipher their links. Clinging to the Paul's central message is really important in this text because you can go down so many other tracks and ignore what is staring us in the face. The main point is this: we cannot separate the nature and work of Jesus and our own call to follow of him. How Jesus did what he did impacts how we are to follow him. Our ethical imperatives stem from the person and work of Christ himself.

Paul explains, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” Then he tells us about Jesus’ mind in the hymn. Lastly he proclaims since God is in you the same mind is demanded and enabled as response from you.

The one mind Paul calls us to be in is Jesus’ humble nature. Jesus emptied himself because he lived for others and followed God’s will. “Equality with God was something that Christ already possessed, but which he chose not to use for his own advantage.”<sup>1</sup> The hymn tells us that because Christ is in the form of God, in his actions, we have the perfect revelation of God’s character. Though Jesus was God, he chose not to exploit his power. The one who humbled himself was then exalted by God.

And then Paul says “therefore.” This means our response is about to be articulated. If then and therefore—these are words to watch out for in the Bible. Now we are to be of “one mind.” Christ did this, God did this, therefore respond with awe. Fear and trembling means awe in our passage. We are in awe because God is at work in us! Paul says we are to be transformed as this God, the one who humbled himself, lives in us. The “one mind” is the mind of Jesus.

We are to be shaped by the same way of thinking as Jesus was. But there are differences in the outcomes for each of us. “As Christ’s way of thinking dictated the obedience that was appropriate for him, so we will find the obedience that is right for us by sharing in his way of thinking.”<sup>2</sup> We don’t become mini replicas of Jesus. Our call is not to be saviors of the world. Instead we are shaped by the mind of Christ as we live in Christ and he lives in us. God leads us towards humility.

“Working out our salvation” means response to God in our daily lives. God is at work in us! The challenging part is that we are not free to do what we want nor is there a precise set of rules to fulfill our calling. Our minds and hearts have been changed by the gospel. Daily living. We are to approach life with humility when we have a leg up on others. There are times when we know we hold power over others, and that people around us will bend to our way if we push. This might be physical power, emotional power, financial power. In these times our call is to remind ourselves that our Lord chose to relinquish his power in order to put others before him.

What does a life lived in awe of God at work in us look like? How do we approach the living of the faith in obedience to Christ’s humility? There are no specific answers, but I know we have all seen it done. I’ve seen church people live this way as far back as I can remember, humbling themselves before others to serve God. Doris, a almost 80 year old retired educator and pastor’s wife, sticks out in my memory as a humble woman from my time at Second Presbyterian. There was a mission trip to Alabama to work in a very impoverished community, fixing and rebuilding homes. Dorris and another elderly woman were the only ones who could stomach working in one of the houses’ kitchens. They were absolutely infested with cockroaches! Others would go in for a few minutes and turn green. But these women were able to work with the mother of the house to clean everything salvageable out and dump the rest so the whole place could be fumigated, bug bombed, and made into a sanitary kitchen again. Self interest would tell us to get out of that house. Christ calls some to these places.

I’ve also seen our church family becomes one in humility for one another. Our shut-ins have shared how important your visits with them, letters, flowers, meals and care have meant in their lives. They are connected to this church through your humble care of them. We all need encouragement to be of the one mind of Christ. Remember Paul

encouraged this Philippian church who were well on their way in discipleship of Christ. He assured them, “I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you WILL BRING IT to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.” (Phil 1:6) Do not fear falling short when we live into the humility of our savior. Only believe and pursue your calling in Christ, letting God dwell within you.

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<sup>1</sup> Morna D. Hooker, “The Letter to the Philippians” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible: a commentary in twelve volumes*, Vol. XI, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000) 507.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Brueggemann, Charles B. Cousar, Beverly R. Gaventa, James D. Newsome, eds., *Texts for Preaching: a lectionary commentary based on the NRSV—year A* (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, 1995) 501.