

Mount Olive Lutheran Church
5327 W. Washington Blvd.
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53208-1798

The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
September 28, 2008
Philippians 2:1-18

“Christ-Minded”

by Pastor Mark E. Wangerin

Introduction

If you have looked at the theme for today’s sermon, you might have had the same question that crossed my mind—Is Christ-Minded actually a word. It may not be the most grammatically correct phrase but it certainly places the emphasis on the right thoughts presented in the Epistle lesson for this morning. The words of St. Paul in Philippians 2 are part of his encouragement and exhortation to the Christian church in Philippi and are very applicable for us as well. In several of the key verses the apostle uses the words “mind” or “same mind” referring to our thoughts and relationships as Christians. This lesson also contains one of the most detailed and important explanations of the mind of Christ in his work of salvation. And so with all this “minded-ness”, our theme seems appropriate. So let us pray that we may be Christ-minded as His word would teach us.

I. A State of Mind

The opening verses of the epistle for today contain some very positive words which may be said to describe a state of mind: “So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind ...” (v.1-2) Encouragement, comfort, participation (or fellowship), affection, sympathy—all these are good qualities to be seen in people. Almost anyone would recognize that. Notice how Paul shows that these things come from God. They are “in Christ”, “from love,” “in the Spirit.” Those who show these characteristics make the joy of the apostle complete for they truly reflect the Christian life. I doubt whether there is anyone anywhere who could find fault with these things. They are truly God-pleasing as the Apostle's exhortation reminds us.

But there is also the contrast to these positive words in the following verses of the text. The warning follows as Paul writes: “Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” (v.3-4) Selfish ambition, vain conceit, considering oneself better than others, looking out only for yourself—if the virtues at the beginning are very beautiful, how ugly these attitudes which are so often evident. The world around is so full of these things--selfish ambition, vain conceit, pride and self-promotion. We see it in so many aspects of our society and probably also in our own lives as well. Where does one start? The current credit crisis, financial crisis, mortgage crisis in our country’s banking and investment markets may be a classic example of the results of failing to heed such an admonition. There may be many aspects to what has gone wrong, but it seems that greed

and the failure to look to the interests of others may play a great role. Perhaps it is also a reminder of what happens when we do not honor the Lord our God with all of our heart and soul and mind and instead place our reliance on wealth.

Is it any wonder that we live in a world of violence and selfishness? Everyone is out for him or herself. Perhaps we are well aware of this right now in the political campaigns. Promise everybody everything they want. No one is really innocent in their ads and it is really difficult at the moment to know who is telling the truth about anything. Perhaps all of these things are a manifestation of God's judgment on a nation that seems to have forgotten Him.

II. The Mind of Christ

The following verse of the text gets us to the central thought of our lesson. For it speak now of our mind and thought and the mind of Christ. "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus ..." Christ most fittingly becomes the center of this discussion and the source of our state of mind. For this word is just the beginning of Paul's amazingly direct and detailed discussion of what is termed the humiliation and exaltation of our Lord. He goes right to the point: "though he was in the form of God, [He] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (v.6-11) There is a great deal of theology contained in these words. The wonder of it all is that Jesus did it for us. He who was true God and true man became a servant for us. He whose glory would be beyond any possibility for any sinful person to behold, took the form of a servant.

For our sake our Lord Jesus Christ humbled himself even to the death of the cross that we might be his own and live under him. What a vivid reminder again of the love of God for us in the One at whose Name every knee will bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. The Savior's love is shown. For as Jesus said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." And in these words which as the central thought of text is the real foundation for all that goes before and all that follows. For our new life, what we are and will be is only in Christ who went on the road before us and who conquered death that we might have life forever in Him.

III. Christ-Minded in the Word

The closing verses of the text remind us that we should be Christ-Minded in the Word.

"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, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Do all things without grumbling or questioning, 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, 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."

At first, these words seem to offer a word of warning—work out your salvation with fear and trembling, but note that immediately after it states—it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. God is the one that has changed our minds in Christ Jesus and given us the same mind. We are about the work of God in Christ. And so as children of God we live in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation. We live as lights in the world. In all of this we hold fast to the word of life. It is in God's word that we grow and stand. It is by his means of grace that we are brought to faith and strengthened in it. It is in the word that we become Christ-minded. The Lord has changed us for the better. The Lord has redeemed us and so we live in Him. We sang in the hymn of the day: "Lord keep us steadfast in thy word ..." Hold fast to that word. Read it. Learn it. Believe it. And the blessed name of him which is above every name will be glorified.

At the name of Jesus
Every knee will bow
Ev'ry tongue confess him
King of Glory now
'Tis the Father's pleasure
We should call him Lord.
Who from the beginning
was the mighty Word.

In your hearts enthrone Him
There let Him subdue
All that is not holy,
All that is not true.
Crown Him as your Captain
In temptations hour
Let His will enfold you
In its light and power.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.