

April 1, 2020

The Scripture Reading

Philippians 2:5-11

5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

6 who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God

as something to be exploited,

7 but emptied himself,

taking the form of a slave,

being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,

8 he humbled himself

and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

9 Therefore God also highly exalted him

and gave him the name

that is above every name,

10 so that at the name of Jesus

every knee should bend,

in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

11 and every tongue should confess

that Jesus Christ is Lord,

to the glory of God the Father.

The Message

WHAT WE DO - Imitate!

Welcome to the EKKLESIA, the assembly of believers in the risen Lord Jesus Christ - the Body of Christ. Tonight we continue our Lenten midweek sermon series, WHAT WE DO, with the theme of "Imitate." We are called by Paul to imitate Christ, specifically the "Mind of Christ."

But it's April Fools. April Fools began in the sixteenth century, in France, when the New Year was moved from March 25th, the Feast of the Annunciation (when the Angel Gabriel told Mary she was going to have God's baby), to January 1. Those who refused to adapt to the new national style, and kept celebrating New Years from March 25 through April 1, were called April Fools.

Fast forward to recent history, though April Fools jokes seem kinda out of place given the crisis reality of our world, it wasn't too long ago when high profile people and institutions played some amazing April Fools pranks. NPR (National Public Radio) announced during their morning news broadcast that then President Ronald Reagan was negotiating to sell Arizona to Canada, and people actually called in to say that Arizona was NOT for sale! Another year, Elon Musk of Tesla fame announced a new Model W on April first. Evidently Wall Street wasn't listening carefully. Musk said in the announcement that it was a new watch (he never produced it), but Wall Street (a gambler's paradise fueled by rumor and other unsavory things) thought it was a new car model, and Tesla stock traded 400,000 shares in the opening moments of trading. And then there was the April first that Richard Branson, the British guy that started Virgin Airlines and Virgin Telephone, announced he was moving his U. S. operations headquarters to Branson, Missouri, since they'd already named the town for him - NOT.

But in the context of tonight's text, Paul's encouragement to "have the mind of Christ" must be a joke. The mind of Christ? The mind of the King of Creation, the Creator of all that is? This is the guy who changed water into wine, healed paralytics, fed thousands, opened the eyes of the blind, raised the dead! How am I supposed to have that kind of mind?

And yet if you examine the texts closely you will see that each of these mega miracles was actually an interruption of where Jesus was (in his head) that day. Mary came up to Jesus at the wedding feast in Cana, to tell him the wine had run out, and what did Jesus say? "Woman, what does that have to do with me?" When friends let the paralytic down through a hole in the roof, they interrupted Jesus. He improvised and taught on forgiveness of sins (Obviously not his intention). When the thousands showed up on the hillside, Jesus had compassion on them, and taught them, and NOBODY had ANY plans for dinner. The synagogue ruler interrupted Jesus when he begged Jesus to come heal his daughter, and the woman in the crowd who tugged at the hem of his robe (and was healed) was obviously an interruption as Jesus said, "Who touched me?" Finally, blind Bartimaeus cry for help interrupted not only Jesus but all the disciples.

So if the mind of Christ wasn't on lofty, dramatic, showy things, what WAS Jesus thinking, and caring about?

In John 13, Jesus' last night, he took off his outer garments, got a bowl of water and a towel, and washed his disciples' feet. Then he said, "So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example so that you should do as I have done for you. Truly, truly, I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him."

In Matthew 11 Jesus said, ". . . I am gentle and humble in heart", and in Romans 15 Paul testified, "For even Christ did not please Himself, but as it is written: 'The insults of those who insult You have fallen on Me.'"

Where was the mind of Christ? - serving, gentle, humble, willingly taking the insults and condemnation that we deserve.

But what exactly did Jesus give up to get to this “mind of Christ”? In John 1 we read, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . Without Him nothing was made.” And then at John 1:14 we read, “The Word was made flesh . . .” That’s our Jesus. In John 8 Jesus says, “Before Abraham was born I AM.” That is Jesus making it clear that he is the very God of all that is, the Great I AM, YAHWEH. In John 17 Jesus prays, “. . . Now Father, glorify me with the glory I had with you before the world existed.” Paul testified in Colossians 1, “The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation . . . He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.” And the author of Hebrews states, “He (God) has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the universe.” Jesus clearly knew who he was and what he had given up. And unlike most of us, Jesus didn’t keep anything in his pocket just in case, no money in the bank against a rainy day. No, the text from tonight’s lesson says, “Though he was in the form of God he did not count equality with God something to be exploited, grasped, held onto. He emptied himself.” That is the theological doctrine of KENOSIS, the self emptying of Christ. Jesus gave up EVERYTHING for us. And finding himself in human form, in human flesh, he became obedient. He became a servant, the least of the least, obedient even unto death, death on the cross, to pay the price for all human sin. And it is for this obedience that God has highly exalted him and given him the name that is above all names.

Why would God exalt a common criminal. After all, that’s how Jesus died, killed by the Romans like a common criminal, between two convicted thieves. The Romans loved crucifixion, the complete humiliation as the victims hung naked for all the world to see, a public spectacle. And they loved the cruelty of it, preceded by the victim being whipped with 39 lashes, carrying their cross beams to the place of death, nailed to the cross, and left to suffer an agonizing tortuous dying as they slowly suffocated. That’s how Jesus died, and it was from THIS death that God exalted him. Why?

It is clear that Jesus knew this was coming. In Mark 10 he told his disciples, “Look, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes. They will condemn Him to death and will deliver Him over to the Gentiles, who will mock Him and spit on Him and flog Him and kill Him. And after three days He will rise again.”

This was the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy (Isaiah 53), “He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief . . . yet we considered Him stricken by God, struck down and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed . . . Yet it was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer.”

This was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Psalm 22, as Jesus cried from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Utterly forsaken, utterly abandoned, Jesus still stayed faithful. He trusted the only one who could save him. His very last words are the evidence, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” And so God raised him up.

How are we supposed to live with the “Mind of Christ.”

The first obligation of a believer is worship. In the fourth century, Bishop Ambrose of Milan was confronted with an Emperor and Empress who were realists, progressives, Arians. Nobody really believed that Jesus, good a man as he was, was really God. The Arians had taken over Milan, the new capital of the empire. Even the army was Arian. When the Empress demanded the Basilica at Milan, for her soldiers to worship their Arian god, Ambrose the faithful Christian (worshiping God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, One God eternal) refused to let the troops in, defied the Empress. How did he do it? It's the Winter of 385-386, and Ambrose held worship day after day after day, with his congregation there singing, and the soldiers refused to enter the church. And the “Mind of Christ” was there.

Fast forward to 2018, Bethel Church in The Hague, the capital of the Netherlands, had in their congregation a family of refugees from Armenia, a family the Dutch government, in a crackdown on asylum seekers, was determined to deport - the Tamrazyans. They were a family of mom, dad, and young children. Even though Dutch law forbade the deportation of families with young children, the government was determined to get rid of this family. Dutch law also forbid police to interrupt a worship service. So Bethel Church, at 1:30 pm on October 26, 2018, brought the Tamrazyans into the church and began 24/7 worship, with members of the church there round the clock singing, reading Scripture, and praying. And the police and government did not enter, not for over six weeks. And the “Mind of Christ” was there.

Now we cannot worship together through this crisis of coronavirus. A pastor in Florida was arrested and charged this week for holding worship services last Sunday. Two Sundays ago, one of our smaller congregations in Northwest Indiana held worship, figuring that eighteen people, mostly family, wouldn't be a problem. Nine of those worshipping have now tested positive for the virus. The mind of Christ does not want that.

Let's get some perspective. The “Mind of Christ” also doesn't want us governed by fear. Turkey has had 131 people die of Covid19. That's terrible. There will probably be more deaths in Turkey. But just six years ago, in 2014, 150 Turks from just one village died in one day in a mining accident. In Brazil, 150 people have died for Covid19. It is an especial tragedy as the President of Brazil has said that it is not a crisis. Yet that is the nation that witnessed the deaths, just last year, of over 240 poor miners - from the collapse of a lake of mining sludge. And the “Mind of Christ” was with them. In India, over 30 people have died of Covid19, and Prime Minister Modi has locked down the country, fearing a catastrophe ahead. Yet that is the country that witnessed the worst industrial disaster in history, as in December 1984 there were between 3,000 and 15,000 (no one really knows how many as the victims lived in shanty towns around the Union Carbide plant in Bhopal) people killed. The “Mind of Christ” still broods over that thoughtless loss of lives.

The United Kingdom has suffered over 1400 deaths of Brits, Scots, and Northern Irish from Covid19. And yet that is the nation that just last year suffered over 96,000 deaths from smoking related causes. And people in the United Kingdom are among the least likely to quit smoking in the British Commonwealth. The “Mind of Christ” is there, in anguish with these people.

The United States has suffered more than 3000 deaths from Covid19. And this is the nation where over 36,000 persons were killed in traffic accidents in 2018. Yesterday, I was walking on McGregor road and I heard it before I saw it. It was a car hurtling toward me, going at least 60, maybe 70 mph, in a 40 zone. It was literally jumping the little rises, and as it approached the corner, just beyond which I stood, waiting and watching, it

began to skid, throwing up the gravel on the shoulder. Do you know that in 2017 over 5,900 American pedestrians, people who may have no other way to get where they need to go, were killed by vehicles on the road. And the “Mind of Christ” is with those least and most at risk.

The “Mind of Christ”, and the heart of Christ, is humble and gentle, serving and suffering with the ones who can least help themselves. If we want the “Mind of Christ”, we must be willing to be where Christ is, doing the things that Jesus does, serving, suffering, caring for the least and the lost. I wish you the “Mind of Christ.”