



THE NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Light of the Valley Lutheran Church

Own the Attitude of Christ

Philippians 2:1-11 (NIV84)

¹ If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

In every generation, there are certain hot-button issues that challenge the Christian community as a whole. Right now, the topic that has risen to the forefront of people's minds and in the headlines of the news is homosexuality. The topic is multi-faceted reaching to ideas such as "Should their union be classified as marriage?" "Are we discriminating against people in these kinds of relationships if we don't allow them to 'marry?'" The answer to those questions is a different topic for a different day.

The reason I bring it up this topic of homosexuality because maybe you've noticed like I have all the different stances coming out in various religious communities. This past week Pope Francis made some comments about the Roman Catholic Church's stance toward homosexuality. The comments were confusing to say the least. On the one hand the pope is talking about welcoming homosexuals, accepting and valuing their sexual orientation but also doing so without compromising Catholic doctrine on family and matrimony. I guess if what the pope was getting at is that we should treat the person who commits homosexual sins like anyone else who sins, then we would agree. We are all sinners, and thankfully God deals with all of us by his grace, which we saw in full view in last week's gospel with the parable of the workers in the vineyard. We still treat sin as sin and we still point it out, confronting it in hopes of correcting it and leading people to Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins. But people in the Catholic community are wondering if they should just accept homosexuals, should they marry them, should they ignore their sin, or should they confront it and oppose it in society as well as in the church?

Closer to home, you see the same sort of confusion and dissension among the LDS on the same topic. There are Mormons who protest their church's stance that homosexuality is wrong, that sexual activity was intended only between a man and a woman in marriage. While the LDS Church does not condone hostility towards those who commit homosexual sins, they also are unwilling to view it as acceptable behavior. While we agree with them on these views, what baffles me is that there are members of the LDS Church who speak openly against their church's stance on homosexuality and they retain membership in a religious community that they don't fully agree with and the LDS Church at large allows the dissenters to continue to oppose official church teachings. No discipline is carried out and the opposing views remain without being directly confronted. Members of the Roman Catholic Church and the LDS Church carry their church's name, but they are anything but unified or like-minded.

Can the same divisiveness and dissension happen among us in a small Lutheran congregation in Utah numbering about 60 households? Could our members divide similarly over the topic of homosexuality? Truthfully, the possibility is always there. All it takes is for some within our church to put their own interests ahead of others, to have personal agendas for the church without consideration for others, for some of us to rate our thoughts and our ideas and our experiences as more valuable and more precious than those of the rest of this body of believers. When we look only to our own thoughts and opinions, the congregation becomes an "us-and-them" conflict instead of a unified body of believers as God intended it to be.

This was what was happening in the Philippian congregation. In chapter 4, Paul wrote specifically to two women of the congregation, two fellow believers in Christ, women of whom Paul was convinced that their names were written in God's book of life. He wrote to them to urge them - plead with them - to agree with each other in the Lord. He wanted them to reach unity and be like-minded - not divisive, argumentative, or combative. How would they ever get to that point? How do we get to be like-minded?

This is what Paul is addressing in our Philippians reading for today. He starts out by reminding his Philippian readers and us what we already have. "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion..." (verse 1) These blessings interweave for the Christian. When God made us one of his

followers, he united us with himself – something that happened either in our baptisms or by hearing of his great love for us which sent his Son to become obedient unto death – even death on a cross – to take away the sins of the world. This unity in Christ means that I view myself in a completely different light. I am wrapped and covered with the perfection won by the humility of Jesus Christ. Everything he did - all that obedience, every second of perfection - now belongs to me. As God looks at me, he sees perfection – not because I have earned it or been so good, but because Jesus has put his perfection over me, covering all my wrongdoings and pride and selfish ambition. This is the comfort that I have as a Christian. This is a love that can never be taken away from me. This is all mine by the Holy Spirit dwelling in me, as he made me his temple upon hearing his Word and by my baptism. And it is in remembering and realizing all that God has done for me that makes me have compassion and tenderness on others, that I care about the people around me in this room, the people I see every day at work or on the streets. They need this love that God has shown me. They need someone to rescue them from their sin. They need Jesus, just like I do, and this prompts me to act.

It is reflecting on these blessings that puts us and the Philippian Christians in the right frame of mind. Since we have all this from God, here is how we are to treat one another. “Make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.” (verses 2-4)

God wants us to be like-minded. He would love to see us coming at things with the same overriding purposes and goals to bring his message of full and free forgiveness to our community, to all people. Being like-minded does not mean that we don’t have different ideas, but it does mean that we have the same purpose with those ideas bringing people to know their God and Savior.

The obstacles to being like-minded are many. All it takes is for one of us to demand our way, to think that I have the best idea and anyone who doesn’t think so is wrong, ignorant. All one of us has to do to chip away at this like-mindedness is to decide that I want something done a certain way because that’s the way that I want it done, giving little to no consideration to our fellow believers or to the community around us that we are called to serve. This is selfish ambition getting in the way of the kingdom of God and the unity that God wants for his believers.

So, what should you do if you know that you are prone to look out only for yourself, to demand things that really are only a benefit to you regardless of what is better for everyone? First thing is to do as God said in our reading from Ezekiel, “Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit.” (Ezekiel 18:30-31) Turn to God and ask him to forgive you for your selfishness, for putting your interests ahead of everyone else’s with no regard for them at all, for thinking that you are more important than others.

As you turn to God and repent, know that you are forgiven by him. Just as he united you with Christ and clothed you with perfection, he has not taken that away from you. He has kept you with him by the work of the Holy Spirit. You are still a part of the body of believers, of the body of Christ. God has given you a new heart and a new spirit.

Being renewed in that forgiveness won by Jesus Christ, now it is time to put his love into practice, to strive for being like-minded with your fellow believers here at Light of the Valley. To get past your selfish ambition, make your attitude the same as that of Christ Jesus. “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped.” (verse 6) He could have stayed in heaven, enjoying the good life, taking that title of Christ to make his life easy. But instead he emptied himself, “made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.” (verse 7) He - who is the highest of all, the one to whom all of us owe honor, allegiance, and obedience - he became a servant. And how did he serve us? “And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!” (verse 8) He gave it all up, including his life, fulfilling God’s will by dying for us. This is how selfless and compassionate he is. This is how we are given a new mindset. Christ is our model when it comes to striving for the like-mindedness that God wants us to have as a body of believers.

When it comes to our little congregation of some 60 families, with the humility of Christ, I actively think of the other 59 when making decisions and putting ideas forward. I need to humbly analyze my own ideas to know when I am pushing something only because I want to see it done for myself or if this truly will be something that will do the most good for all families here. When I look around our church on Sunday morning, I see my partners, fellow recipients of God’s compassion and fellow workers in the kingdom of God. How can we work together in our service to God? How can I put the interest of others ahead of my own?

We do this because Jesus put our interests ahead of his own. He humbled himself when he never had to all so that we would be exalted with him. He did it for us. So, we make our attitude the same as that of Christ Jesus and strive to be like-minded with one another. Amen.