

The Rev. Michael J. Bridge
Sermon- Philippians 2:1-11
Sunday, April 9, 2017

Put others first

1. “¹ So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”
2. These verses precede our passage from Philippians for today, and they should help us to really understand the point of what Paul is saying in the coming verses. This passage was a call to the Philippians, and is a call to all of us as Christians, to model our lives after Jesus, using his humility and sacrifice as a means to help us understand what it means for us to be humble and self-sacrificial.
3. In the letter, Paul was speaking to the community of believers in Philippi. Thus, even as we receive the words individually, we should also receive them as a community. Have the mind of Christ. Show the love of Christ. Be in full accord and of one mind. Have unity in our love. Do nothing from selfish ambition, but put others ahead of yourself- as a person, and as a community of believers. Look not only to our own interests as a church, but to the interests of others, letting the love of Christ flow and be reflected through us as the Body of Christ.
4. Obviously, the call to holiness and Christlikeness is important for each of us as individuals. That should never be doubted, and never forgotten. Each of us has a responsibility to grow in Spirit and truth, being conformed to the image of Christ, cooperating with the Spirit at work in our lives.
5. All of that said, we have a tendency to make the Christian life too individualistic, when it was always about community. Going back to Israel and coming up through the Church, we see God covenanting with communities, and we see the prophets and the apostles primarily speaking to communities. When we read Philippians 2, indeed all of Philippians, we should see our responsibility to and within the community to be a body that is conformed to Christ, and not just a collection of individual disciples.
6. When we get caught up in quarrels and rivalry, in ambition and conceit, we separate the body; we injure the body. We assault the very Bride of Christ. It is worth remembering that you or I are not the Bride of Christ. You *and* I are the Bride of Christ.

As Christ put us first

1. Getting to verses 5-11, Paul points to Christ as a means of helping us interpret what we were being told in the previous verses.
 - a. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus...
 - b. From there he goes on to outline the incredible example of sacrifice and humility demonstrated by Jesus. We don't want to make the mistake of believing that this is *just* about the example he set. His humility and sacrifice were, first and foremost, effectual in completing God's plan of salvation on our behalf.
2. Paul does want us to recognize that Jesus' work is also a great example of the way we should work on others' behalf. If we are to be like Christ, have the mind of Christ, and

look to the good of others ahead of ourselves, we can't dismiss the way in which Jesus embodied that.

3. Don't miss the description Paul gives of just what Jesus did, and how it connects to what he is calling us to.
 - a. ⁶ ...though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.
4. Jesus has always existed. He is God's eternal Son. There was never a time when he was not. God- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit- are perfect, holy, and complete. They are without need, and exist in a perfect love relationship with one another.
 - a. When Paul talks about Jesus emptying himself by taking the form of a servant, he is saying that the eternal Son, creator and Lord of all, became like that which he created- us, who are to serve him. The one most worthy of being served, made himself the great servant.
 - b. Even more, because he added humanity to his divine nature, he added the ability to suffer and die- something which God was not capable of. Not only did he add the ability to suffer and die to his nature; he actually suffered and died on our behalf. His suffering was extreme, and his death- death on a cross- was one of the worst deaths (in terms of suffering and shame) humanity has ever come up with.
5. All of this is what Paul wants us to understand when he calls us to putting others ahead of ourselves, humbling ourselves, and looking to the interests of others. When we understand the depth of Jesus' humility, then we might find our own attitudes changing. Instead of asking a question like, "How far must I go to serve and honor my God?" you might find yourself asking the much better question, "How far can I go, with God's help, in serving and honoring him in others?"
 - a. That is a powerful change of mindset for a believer- going from how much must I, to how much can I? Now, imagine a community of believers such as New Life Anglican Church- a community of individuals who live this out- coming together to be a likeminded community, asking and praying, "God, how much can you and will you do through us, as we are ready to serve you just as Christ came and served us?"
 - b. I think that is precisely the kind of community Paul is calling us to be when he says, "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus."