

Streetsville United Church
Sunday, September 28, 2008
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"OF TWO MINDS"

Philippians 2:5

Sometimes we speak of ourselves as having two minds or of being double minded. It's not a medical condition; it happens when we've looked at an issue and see good arguments for both sides. We say, "I'm of two minds" and we may find it hard to make a decision and move forward. Sometimes this even happens in the church. Now if a situation is clearly addressed in God's word, then we are constrained to follow it. But there are issues which God's word does not address quite so clearly and good people may come down on opposing sides. Sometimes the church's unity is even threatened.

Now we Christians are of two minds but in a different and more positive way than I've described. Paul was writing to the Philippians, a church that he had founded and loved. The church had some disagreements which threatened its unity and stability. So Paul addressed the issue and sums up his teaching in chapter 2 verse 5, "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus..."

Paul was saying, "God has given you the mind of Christ, so let his mind really take hold of you, as individuals and as a church. That is the way through your difficulties." And here is the sense in which Christians are of two minds. We have a natural mind which is shaped by the world's thinking. But when we bowed to Christ and accepted him as Lord and Saviour, God put the mind of Christ in us. God gave us the mind of Christ. So along with the natural mind we also have the mind of Christ. And the goal of the Christian life is to let the mind of Christ grow in us and increasingly shape our way of thinking and acting.

A Christian visiting Canada from South Korea was asked what he thought of Canada. He smiled and said, "Canada is like one great big park." "And what about its people?" he was asked. His smile disappeared and with some sadness he said, "In Canada, it is difficult to tell who is Christian because Christians in this country are so much like the people of the world." In Romans 12 Paul says, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds." This is really the church's biggest need today - not to be conformed to the world, but to increasingly think and act with the mind of Christ that God has given us. It is necessary for the health of the church. It is necessary if

Christians are going to be salt and light in the world, as Christ calls us to be. "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus..."

With God's help we can do that. In 2:13, Paul writes, "For God is at work in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure." God has given us the mind of Christ and is working to grow that mind within us. Now we do our part by studying the life and teachings of Jesus, by reading the Bible alone and with others, by reading good Christian literature, by praying, by worship. This allows the Holy Spirit to work in us so that more and more our thinking and acting become shaped by the mind of Christ. "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus..." What is this mind of Christ which God has given us?

First, Paul tells that us the mind of Christ "looks not only to one's own interests but to the interests of others." (Verse 4)

Now the natural mind thinks of ourselves and our own interests first. In fact, the world encourages us to do so. Now to a degree, it's necessary. As fallen humans we often need the incentive of self-interest to do our best. Of course self-interest can get of control. No doubt so much of the Wall Street crisis occurred because both lenders and borrowed let self-interest and greed cloud their better judgement. In so much of what we do we subtly ask ourselves, "What's in it for me?" Even when we ask people to serve we often appeal to the natural mind. "Look what you can get out of it - you'll make new friends, grow your skills, find personal satisfaction." Well, sometimes and sometimes not. Sometimes we must respond to the call because it serves the broader community interest or the interests of the body of Christ.

In the church we seek to know and do God's will, not our own. This brings blessing and unity to the church. But sometimes the natural mind takes over so that getting our own way becomes more important. May God deliver us from such thinking and help the mind of Christ to grow in us. "Let each of you look not only to his own interests but to the interests of others..."

Such an attitude is necessary in so much of life. The new Maple Leaf coach Ron Wilson was quoted as saying, "Players must put the team first, not individual statistics." We'll see how long that lasts. In the marriage ceremony as husband and wife light a candle together representing their unity into one flesh, I say, "From now on their thoughts shall be for each other, rather than for their own individual selves." Now the mind of Christ will never fully take hold of us this side of heaven, but at least some of this attitude is necessary for marriage to grow and flourish.

Now Jesus is the prime example of making the interests of others not just equal to his own, but ahead of his own. Yes, He knew he would rise from the dead, but if he had been at all self-interested he never would have accepted death, even death on a cross, suffering for us far beyond our understanding, bearing our sin, and enduring for a time the absence of the Father's presence and comfort. But he did it for us. He set aside his own interests for our salvation unto eternal life. "Let each of you look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."

Sometimes we see the Christ mind in action in a way that takes our breath away. Some years ago a Boeing 747 crashed into the Potomac River outside Washington D. C. In one place, five survivors were floating in the cold water clinging to bits and pieces of the plane. A helicopter lowered a grappling hook which a man caught and passed to another person floating in the water. Two, three, four times the helicopter came and went, lowering the grappling hook and each time the man caught it and passed it to someone else. When the helicopter returned to pick him up - he was gone. No one knew anything about him other than that "he was the man in the water - the balding man with the wild mustache." "Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus."

Secondly, the mind of Christ which God has given us is the mind of a servant.

In this wonderful passage about Christ which was probably an early Christian hymn Paul writes, "Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in human likeness..." (Phil. 2:6,7) Jesus, the pre-existent Son of God gave up all heavenly privileges in order to become a servant for the sake of the world. He was God in human form, but always saw himself as the Lord's servant and acted that way. He said, "I came not to be served, but to serve." Jesus once took a towel and washed his disciples feet and that was the task of a household slave. And the death he died to reconcile us to God was his greatest service of all. God is working to develop the mind of Christ within us - a mind which sees ourselves dedicated to the service of God and the service of humanity.

Now the natural human mind sometimes sees life that way and talks that way, but soon it deviates from serving others to serving ourselves. This is what makes us cynical about politicians. To give them credit, they often start off well, speaking about their motivation to serve the people, but after a time in Washington or Ottawa or Queen's Park, they begin serving their own interests.

It doesn't happen to them all, of course, but it happens to more than a few. Rare is the person who consistently sees their life as that of a servant.

But that's the mind God has given us in Christ. Life is not about simply gaining your own comfort and security; it's about using your gifts in the service of God and others. No matter what our occupation, no matter how high we climb, we are children of God who serve the living God and serve one another. Even the highest positions in government or business or education are positions of service. In fact, such positions give a person more leverage to serve. The only kind of power a servant wants or seeks is the power to serve. And even when you retire from your job, you don't retire as a servant of the living God. "Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus - the mind of a servant." When you are asked to take a position or do a task for the church, please consider saying "Yes," rather quickly saying, "No." The church needs lots of "Yes people", if we are going to fulfill our mission.

Finally, the mind of Christ which God has given us is a humble mind.

Paul tells us that "Christ humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even unto death on a cross." (Phil. 2:8) I once read this description of a person, "He remains cool, aloof, an academic who seems to believe he's the smartest person in every room he enters and that he doesn't need anyone's advice." Now some of it may be due to the person's personality, but not the last part about "believing he's the smartest person who doesn't need anyone's advice." That arrogant attitude is the opposite of the humble mind of Christ. "Christ did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself..." Jesus always, always put himself under God's direction. He sought the Father's will and did it. Having the mind of Christ means putting ourselves under God's word, realizing that we don't know it all, and that God has still has much to teach us. A humble mind is a teachable mind, open to the teaching of God's word, and listens to the insights of others. And I've found that I often learn something valuable even from those with whom I disagree. "Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus" - a humble mind.

As I close look at what Paul says happened to the One who humbled himself unto death, even death on a Cross. "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed upon Him the Name that is above every Name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:9-11)

Thanks be to God — we are among those who bow at Jesus' Name, confess Him as Lord and share in his everlasting victory. "Therefore, have this mind

among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus.” With God’s help may the mind of Christ more and more mark our thoughts and our actions until that glorious day when we see our Lord as he is, and wonder of wonders, we will be like Him!