

**PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON
“THE MIND OF CHRIST”
Philippians 2:1-22
September 28, 2008
8:45 & 11:00 A.M. SERVICES**

God’s redemptive work in Christ involves the transformation of our thinking as well as our actions. Paul issued a challenge for us to think as Jesus thought, which was in terms of service and self-giving love. All who follow Jesus have a calling to ministry. This does not mean we are all called to be professional clergy. Anything we do that improves the life of another person or makes the world a better place is the work of ministry. Following Jesus means doing the kinds of things Jesus did. This is our calling.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s first novel was *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. It describes life in a Soviet concentration camp in Siberia on a “**good**” day. Three things account for a good day: **first**, the prisoner manages to hide a bit of extra food; **second**, he receives no unusual punishment for misconduct; **third**, he avoids being put in solitary confinement in a freezing cell. Because we are relational creatures; imprisonment generally and solitary confinement, in particular, represent inhuman forms of punishment. Listen to the words of a prisoner of war; he writes in his diary: “**I cannot control what they do to me physically . . . But I fight to control my mind. In this inhuman situation I must keep my citizenship as a member of the human race.**”

Paul’s letter to the church at Philippi was written from prison. Paul’s original visit to Philippi was the first time the gospel had been established on European soil. He had great affection for these Philippian Christians, and some suggest he may have loved this church more than any other. The letter opens with a moving expression of gratitude, which may be found today in musical settings. The Philippians have been faithful in supporting Paul’s work and caring for him personally. He offers an impressive tribute to the

congregation that begins, ***“I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, constantly praying in joy in all of my prayers for you.”***

Philippi was a Roman colony, so its residents had Roman citizenship. Paul writes that his readers must be faithful to a higher citizenship. (1:27-28; 3:20) Their true citizenship is in heaven; therefore, their life together should be as a colony of heaven on earth. They must live in a manner worthy of their higher citizenship. Paul exhorts them to a manner of life that is worthy of the gospel of Christ, which requires both unity and courage. The second chapter of Philippians begins with a call for unity through self-abnegation. ***“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit,”*** he writes, ***“but in humility regard others better than yourselves.”*** He encourages them not to look to their own interests but to the interests of others. Then Paul gives them the supreme example of the attitude and spirit he is recommending: ***“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”*** (2:5)

Many commentators believe Philippians 2:5-11 was a hymn of the early church that Paul effectively appropriated. Paul encourages the Philippians to have the mind of Christ, ***“Let this mind be in you . . .”*** But how do we find the mind of Christ? Where do we find it? Well, it seems that we have already been given the mind of Christ. Paul is inviting us to be who we are as Christians! Even if we are involved in some disagreement, some small arguments about how things are being done, we are to be Christ-like, nonetheless.

We must have the mind of Christ; not that we will all think the same way, nor ever express an idea that is not different from all others. But when and where there is dissension, we can all share the same attitude. We can all approach dissension with an attitude of prayer. Paul invites us to listen with an open mind and have an attitude that is willing to hear both sides of an issue.

Paul knows these Philippian Christians. He is eager to remind them of who they are and encourage them to live accordingly. George Macdonald, mentor to C. S. Lewis, once noted that Paul’s letters are sometimes confusing at the intellectual level, but never at the practical level. One reason they may be difficult is that they are letters, one-way communications, and we do not have the other side of the conversation. But, Macdonald said, the person who really wants to follow Jesus has no trouble finding the mind of Christ. Our problem is that too often we want to know the mind of Christ so we can decide whether we want to follow him or not.

Paul calls for unity through self-abnegation. Self-abnegation is not self-hatred. It is not self-despising. It is in no way a rejection of the self. It is simply the refusal to let personal interest or advantage govern the course of one's life. Life in the church, among those of us who call ourselves Christians, is to be different. We are to abandon our self-serving ways. In humility we are to serve and care for each other. You may remember coming in the house as a child from a **"falling out"** among your friends. Your mother wanted to know what happened. You explained that a fight had broken out over where the new clubhouse was to be located. Your mother disapproved, and you explained that everyone was fighting and you didn't have a choice. Then your mother said, **"But we don't settle our differences that way."** In other words, our family does not live like just anybody else. There are some ideals, some standards that are expected of you because of who you are.

Thomas Moore was a good Englishman. As Lord Chancellor under Henry VIII, he genuinely wanted to serve his king and his country. But he held a higher citizenship. When the great conflict between king and conscience came to a head, when Henry himself begged the noble man to speak out and save his life, Thomas More would not betray the eternal kingdom where truth is not for sale. In 1960 Robert Bolt dubbed him **"a man for all seasons."**

If we have the mind of Christ Jesus, some of the proudest of us will have to get down on our knees and wash the feet of the least proud. Some of the wealthiest of us will have to sell part of our treasure and give the money to the poor. Some of the best of us would have to embrace some of the worst of us. In such self-abnegating love Christ would live in us fully. Then, having suffered with him, we would be exalted with him - - whose name is above every name and at whose name every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Our deeds of kindness and service simply mirror the ways of God in the world. We are to give and serve out of hearts full of love. All to Jesus, I surrender! I would love to be your pastor. I would love for this to be your church.