

## ***of one mind***

**This morning we return** to our study in Paul's letter to the Philippians.

Now, in case you are just joining us today, or are simply wired like me, you may need **a reminder** as to why we're studying Philippians. And the most basic answer is simply that we're not that different to the Philippians and the Philippian church. Or to say it more strongly, ***we're a lot like the Philippian church.*** Which makes this letter very relevant for us.

We're a people who have and are experiencing God's grace at work among us, and yet who also struggle at times with one another, in subtle and not-so-subtle ways—*much like the Philippian Christians...*

I suspect this is true of every church, if we're willing to be honest.

We're a people who finding ourselves at odds at times with the values of our culture – *much like the Christians in Philippi.*

We're a church with some pain and disappointment about some things that have happened and haven't happened over the years – we have a complicated story of beauty and pain – *much like the church in Philippi.*

We're a church with much to celebrate – of God's work among us – down through the years and today – and yet also a people who

continually need to relearn and practice the basic Christian skills of humble repentance, gracious forgiveness and loving reconciliation—*much like the Philippians.*

And lastly, let me say that we are a church that needs to be reminded again and again that the gospel still has power today – that **the Story is not over** – the Story of God’s work in our world and in our lives and in our church **is not over**. As Paul himself writes to the Philippians early in this letter – **Philippians 1:6** – “*He who began a good work in you **will** carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*”

That’s a word that the Philippians needed to hear and believe, and that we need to hear as well – personally and together...

**This is some of why we’re studying **Philippians** these days.**

And this morning, as we step into **chapter 2**, we cross the threshold into the real heart of the letter... into the heart of Paul, and of the gospel, really. Which is to say, this is where Paul really gets down to brass tacks – speaking directly to the Philippian Christians and to us.

Up until this point in the letter, it’s possible that, as this letter was first read out in the Philippian congregation, the Philippians might have simply smiled along, remembering Paul with fondness, those

early days, so thankful to hear from him, encouraged that he is encouraged. **But here**, as they'd cross the threshold into **chapter 2**, there must have been some **rustling in their seats** – as Paul's words began to speak directly to their lives and relationships... the very reason he wrote the letter.

Let's listen together to what he writes. I'll read it for us.

### **Philippians 2:1-11**

*(1) Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in 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 of one mind. (3) Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, (4) not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.*

*(5) In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:*

*(6) Who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be used to  
his own advantage;*

*(7) rather, he made himself nothing  
by taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.*

*(8) And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
by becoming 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 acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.*

As our brothers and sisters in the Anglican tradition would say,  
"**The word of the Lord**" – "Thanks be to God."

**Let's pray...**

Now, it's helpful in reading this to remember or acknowledge something really obvious, but that sometimes we lose sight of simply because of our historical distance to the Philippians. And it's simply that they were people and a community **just like us** – as we named at the start.

They sinned no less than us. They experienced grace no less than us. They loved Jesus no less than us, and they struggled with the reality and implications of the gospel no less than us. And in regard to their relationships, they blessed and served one another at times, and they annoyed, frustrated and hurt one another at times.

The simple fact that Paul has to exhort them to live a life worthy of the gospel and to get along, tells us that they were not some perfect church made up of perfect people.

**Remember the people who came together to form the beginnings of the church in Philippi?** We talked about them a few weeks back.

**Acts 16** tells us the story of Paul's early days in Philippi – and there we are introduced to a wealthy and influential business-woman named **Lydia**. A young **slave girl** who'd been oppressed by a demonic

spirit for some time, and used by her masters for financial gain. And a blue-collar man – the local **Jailer**. Three people that didn't have much in common, other than their experience of the gospel and newfound loyalty to Jesus.

*And so imagine what the years would have brought as these three **very different people** sought to be a community and invited others to join them.*

Let me read for you something that's been helpful for me.

*"This is purely speculation, but do you suppose there is a chance that as the church at Philippi grew, Lydia starts to struggle with pride. She's got a big house. She funds a big part of what's going on in the church... she might think her ideas.. are the right ideas.*

*What about the slave girl? Do you suppose that, as she gets older, she might have some relational issues? Do you think that perhaps she might struggle with trusting people, particularly men?*

*What about the Jailer? Do you think that our blue-collar guy might struggle with being gruff and handling everyone like they've got the thick skin of a soldier or prisoner?" (Matt Chandler, 44)*

As he says, it's purely speculation, but it's not that implausible. The kind of real-life dynamics that at times would make unity and community **hard**, maybe even undesirable. *I'm sure they had moments where some of them wished there was another church in town to join...*

And beyond speculation, if we read ahead in this very letter, in chapter 4, Paul explicitly mentions two women – **Euodia** and **Synteche** – two women who had served together alongside Paul years

ago, and yet who now, at the time of Paul's writing, need help to be reconciled.

Whatever the particulars, Paul's words here were needed and would have been undeniably relevant.

As they are to any church in any age...

***As they are for us today.***

*(1) Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in 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 of one mind.*

Ok, stop here and clarify: **What is the source of Paul's joy?**

This is something we need to keep coming back to. It's not the typical things we'd list or expect – being released from prison, winning the lottery, getting a new iPhone, a doppio long-pour at Drumroaster after an early morning ride.

No, the thing that causes Paul to rejoice most deeply is **Jesus Christ being glorified, honored, worshipped**. And here, we see that what honors Jesus – what reveals His glory powerfully – is Christians, those who are united with Christ, **being united together in Christ...** being united together in the gospel – in heart and soul and mind and strength.

Already in this letter, Paul has affirmed that God's ongoing work in the Philippians is something that causes him great joy. Right? Do

you remember it? Ch **1:3-4**, *"I thank my God in all my remembrance of you. In all my prayers for all of you I always pray with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now..."*

And here, **Paul picks up on that joy** and that reality – the reality of their experience of grace – the reality of their experience of the gospel – *the encouragement they know from being united with Christ, the comfort they experience from His love, the fellowship of the Spirit that they can attest to, the tenderness and compassion of Christ evident in them...*

**"But don't stop there!"** Paul says. Don't believe the lie that this is all there is – that this is all that God wants and can do – that this is the **goal** of God's grace – your **personal** faith... your **individual** faith...

**No!** Instead, let the gospel have its full way in you and among you – bearing the fruit of true **unity** in Christ.

Not just **standing alone in Christ** together – but being bound together in Christ... true **partners in the gospel**...

**"being like-minded**, *having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others."*

**What a beautiful picture** of the gospel bearing it's fruit... of the **gospel alive in the life of a community** – a people not simply

united to Christ, but **being united together in Christ. A people – a community – who's relationships are guided and empowered by the heart and ways of Jesus, by the grace of God.**

What a beautiful picture.

And **what a difficult call...**

It's way easier **to stand alone in Christ together...**

But, thankfully, Jesus and the gospel are better than that.

Which is to say that God desires more than that for us – and so the gospel goes deeper than that – seeking not only to restore us to Christ, but **in Christ to one another.**

Because this is what we've been made for – **for community** – with God and one another. No matter how introverted or extroverted we are... We have been **made** to love God with all of our heart and soul and mind and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

***To love and be loved... And so the gospel is about restoring that...***

But, as the story of the Philippian church – the Philippian Christians demonstrates – our hearts, bent by the power and curse of sin, are prone to the very things that strain relationships and destroy community, and leave us isolated (though possibly still together).



Paul distills these familiar, sin-bent ways as "**selfish ambition** and *vain conceit*".

Imagine what a community, a family, a neighborhood, a workplace, a house, a church dominated by "*selfish ambition and vain conceit*" feels like.

Sadly, I suspect some of us don't have to work too hard to imagine this...

Now it's helpful and important to understand that these two destructive ways of relating – are actually the fruit of something deeper.

The fruit of **a mindset**. A ***sin-bent mindset***.

Paul points us toward this insight.

Three times in this passage, Paul refers to our **minds** – calling us in **v.2** to "*be like-minded...*" and then again to "*being... of one mind...*" And then in **v.5**, he explicitly calls us to "*have the mindset of Christ Jesus.*"

Why? Because **our natural** – that is, sin-bent **mindset**, grasps after and seeks our **own exaltation...** our **own honor...** to the detriment of relationships and community.

Our natural mindset is one that seeks our **own** exaltation – our **own** honor... to elevate **ourselves...**

Paul's already talked about this in chapter 1 in referring to those who are excitedly stepping up to preach the gospel in his absence, but who are doing so out of **selfish ambition** – hoping to surpass Paul.

But it's not just an isolated incidence.

It's pervasive. It's systemic. It's **everywhere**...

**We do this.** We all do. Sometimes without even trying – its so deeply ingrained in the way of our world – ancient and modern.

We jockey for position and honor.

Someone shares about an accomplishment, and our minds and hearts run with the desire or need to share one of our own. Or we beat ourselves up because we know that we have nothing to match it – and we feel deep shame about this.

We are wired to **elevate ourselves** – either by lifting ourselves up in the eyes of others, by diminishing another, or by beating ourselves up because we know we could never measure up. All of these are expressions of the same **mindset** – the need and desire for self-exaltation.

Just thinking about this makes me wonder about how often **I've** referred to someone I know and admire greatly, and then subtly or not-so-subtly, in the next breath, shared how connected I am to them, or how we both went to the same school or studied the same thing at Regent – attempting to elevate myself in the process. As though

knowing them, or studying at the same school, places me in their category of wisdom or whatever...

All that to say, **self-exaltation** – whether through elevating ourselves, diminishing others or ourselves – is our native tongue. A mindset we all live from at times... to the detriment of relationships and community, leaving us all alone in the crowd.

### **Ok, so what do we do?**

Well, what does Paul say?

If we know the text, our minds or eyes run to **v.3-4** –

*"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others."*

Which sounds like good advice. **And it is. Except that the sin-bent heart can't ever truly unbend itself.** Our mindset has to be rescued and renovated by the gospel.

And Paul knows this, and so he continues – **v.5.**

*"In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus..."*

Paul points us toward a different way – a better way of relating – **and then he points us toward Christ and the mindset of Christ.**

**In your relationships with** *one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:*

*Who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be used to  
his own advantage;*

*rather, he made himself nothing  
by taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.  
And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross.*

For centuries, students of scripture have **cherished** this passage as one of the most theologically rich texts in the New Testament – delving into/opening up some of the deep mysteries of the Divinity of Jesus alongside the Humanity of Jesus – the mystery of the Incarnation and the Cross. There are libraries of books on this text alone – whole doctoral dissertations written solely to plumb the depths of a single word here – specifically, *kenosis* (the self-emptying of God).

Many commentaries treat **Philippians 1:5-11** as a distinct text, apart from **v.1-4**. Possibly because there simply is so much here to attend to.

**But here's the problem:** Paul didn't write **vs.5-11** as an isolated treatise or theological statement. **No!** This exploration of the mystery of Jesus' incarnation, self-emptying, humility and obedient death **is all** stated with a view toward helping us understanding **the mindset of Jesus Christ** – a mindset we are invited, through the gospel, to have as our own...

So, let's lean into what Paul is saying here – about the mindset of Jesus.

In contrast to **our** self-exalting, honor-grasping mindset and ways, Paul poetically describes Jesus:

*"Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing [the greek literally says, "he emptied himself"] by taking the very nature of a servant..."*

We'll stop here, because this is where the gospel begins to break through the surface. Or at least it will as we explore what Paul is saying.

Think big picture with me.

Here is Jesus – **"in very nature God"** – that is, fully, truly God. Worthy of all Honor. Worthy of all Praise. With all power and authority and right to rule.

And yet, Paul says,

*"Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage...".* Other translations say, *"did not consider equality with God something to be grasped..."*

And here's the word or idea that countless books have been written on – **v.7**,

*"rather, **he made himself nothing**, by taking the very nature of a servant..."*

As I said a moment ago, this phrase, *"He made Himself nothing"*, in the greek is **this word *kenosis*** – which literally means, **"emptied himself."**

Jesus emptied Himself. He laid something aside – "by taking the very nature of a servant".

Scholars, theologians and Bible-readers for centuries have argued about what this means. Whole heresies have sprung from the soil of this passage. Specifically the claim that Jesus, in becoming a man, laid aside his Divinity.

That he **chose** to lay aside – to **empty himself** – of his Divinity – so as to become a servant.

But that's not what Paul says. **Just the opposite**, in fact. And this is at the heart of what Paul wants us to see and hear...

N.T. Wright, a contemporary bible scholar and theologian distils this well. **He says,**

"The decision to become human, and to go all the way along the road of obedience, obedience to the divine plan of salvation, yes, all the way to the cross—this decision was not a decision to stop being divine. It was a decision about *what it really meant to be divine.*"

Do you hear what he's saying? What Paul is saying?

That **in the self-emptying of Jesus** – the servant-heart of Jesus – the cross of Christ – we are invited to see and know **not** what God does when he lays aside His glory – but what **is** truly the glory of God.

What **is** at the core of His very being – **the very nature of a Servant.**

Let me say that again – because this is mind-bending for our perception of God – and the world's perception of God.

In the self-emptying of Jesus – the servant-heart of Jesus – in the cross of Christ – we are invited to see **not** what God does when he lays aside **His essential nature** – but **who God is in his very nature...**

**He is a God who serves.**

Who seeks the honor and glory of the other.

This, according to the Paul... This, according to Jesus, **is** the glory of God – **the very nature** of God – not to grasp after praise, but to serve the other...

Let me give an illustration that should help pull this out of the realm of abstract theology – and help us see the beauty of this... (I'm borrowing the arch of this story from another.)

*The story is told of an Indigenous chief. He is the **strongest** man in the village. As the chief of his village, he wears a very large headdress and ceremonial robes.*

*One day a man carrying water out of the shaft of a deep well fell and broke his leg, and lay helpless at the bottom of the well. To get down to the bottom, one would have to climb down, using the alternating slits that go all the way down the deep well, and then climb back up.*

*Because no one could carry the helpless man up like this, the chief was summoned. When he saw the plight of the man, he laid aside his headdress and his robe, climbed all the way to the bottom, put the injured man on himself, and brought him to safety. He did what no other man could do...*

Now, **let me ask you:** In that moment and act, did the chief cease being the chief when he laid aside his headdress and climbed down to rescue the man?

**No!**

**Of course not!**

**Just the opposite!**

In laying down his headdress and climbing down the well, the chief revealed the kind of Chief he really was!

***And all the more so - with Jesus.***

In becoming a servant, humbling himself and becoming obedient to death on the cross – Jesus did not cease to be God. Rather, **He revealed the kind of God that God really is...** He revealed **the very nature of God...** A God whose glory is in serving and honoring others.

This is the God we worship and follow in Christ.

**(v9) Therefore God** [the Father] *exalted him [Jesus] 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 acknowledge that Jesus Christ is **Lord**, to the glory of God the Father.*

A Lord who **rules** through **servicing** – through lifting up others.

For Paul, this isn't just poetry, doxology, or good theology – this is, in fact, **the way forward together** – into the unity of Christ.

Not simply by trying harder to do nothing out of selfish ambition, but by fixing our eyes on Jesus – by seeing and delighting in His very nature – His humble heart – His heart of a Servant.



And then joining Him in his humble serving of one another...

Joining Him in the joy of honoring another.

As Jesus does...

To the glory of God the Father.

### **Let's pray.**

#### ----- invitation to the Lord's Table

- To confess our self-exalting mindset and ways.
  - To receive the forgiveness that Jesus offers through the cross.
- To fix our eyes on Jesus – who desires to draw us into His glory – His servant heart.