

"THE MIND OF CHRIST"

Philippians 2:1-11

It was October, 1979 and Pope John II was planning to visit the United States. The plans and preparations for his coming were out of this world, all the details, all the security. The planning required precision and thoroughness. There were also humorous moments but one stood out above them all. In Chicago, the nation's largest Roman Catholic archdiocese, officials preparing for the Pope's arrival came to discover that the local papal throne was missing. You see, it is customary in the Roman Catholic Church for each archdiocese to maintain a "throne room" in the event a Pope would visit. But since a Pope had never visited Chicago and the hope of one ever coming had been given up, the throne room in Cardinal John Cody's residence had been turned into a committee room. The week before the Pope was to visit, workmen worked frantically reinstalling a platform for the throne.

Officials had a momentary meltdown when no one could remember what happened to the throne. They eventually found it, with other discarded items in a storage room at a nearby Catholic college.

Now let me share with you a parable: **No one could remember what had happened to the throne.** Now here is what is also so sad, on a personal note- for many people their lives are void of a throne room. Or, maybe it is this- we are the ones who sit on the throne of our lives. Or maybe it is this- as Christians, we profess Jesus as Lord but we have not fully come to terms with who He really is, and what He wants of us. Do we have a "throne room" in our lives, and, if we do, who occupies it?

Chapter two of Philippians is about the Lord Jesus Christ who is Servant and it addresses those of us who would be followers of such a Lord. Chapter two also addresses Christian conduct within the Christian Community, i.e. the Church.

Folks, **if there was one danger that threatened the Philippian church and that Paul was concerned over it was disunity**. Last Sunday we looked at Philippians 1:27-30 where Paul challenges the Christians at Philippi in verse 27 to, stand “firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel.” Paul is pitching for “spiritual unity” in the church. If you look to verses 3 and 4 of our passage today, Paul gives us the three main causes of disunity. **First, a cause for disunity is selfish ambition**. I don’t care where you go there are people who consciously or subconsciously are in it to advance themselves and possibly their cause. Is the ministry of a church wrapped up in one person or a few people or is the ministry about Christ and building His Kingdom? Is the ministry about me, is the ministry about you, or is the ministry about us working together to minister in Christ’s name? Selfish ambition has no place in the church of Jesus Christ.

A second cause for disunity is the desire for prestige. For some people prestige is even more important than wealth. Some like to be on display, they like to be glorified and they soak it up and it can go to their heads. They want all eyes on them when all eyes need to be fixed on God. Maybe you have seen it, I have, when an artist who is a Christian, when, after giving a performance and the applause begins, they will thrust their pointer finger to the sky saying, in essence, "God is getting the glory, not me." A desire for prestige can cause disunity.

And a third cause for disunity is a focus on self. If a person is only concerned with his or her own interests there is bound to be a collision with others. If it is all about the person winning, if it all about the person getting their way, which of course is the only, the right way then life will be one big competition where the person is always striving to win because, well, they are going to win and you, my friend, will lose. And so don't get in their way because you don't want to be their enemy or, at the least, their

opponent who they are seeking to eliminate. And so the object is to push others down and as they seek to rise to the top the poor other guy gets stomped under.

Friends, this is the way of the competitive world, the way of the jungle, the survival of the fittest, and it can make its way into the church if people are not careful. Why do I say this? Because the church is made up of sinful people like you and like me and sometimes our agenda can pole vault over God's agenda and it can get ugly, even in the church.

And so Paul wants to lift up unity and harmony. Paul doesn't focus on the past of the Philippian Christians, their shortcomings and mistakes. Rather he lifts up to the conscious level those qualities of common life that the church has been identified as having and which have sustained the church.

Paul uses four expressions in our passage for a reason and that is for emphasis and for clarity, for he challenges them to be of the same mind.

Those four expressions are: 1) being of the same mind; 2) having the same love; 3) being in full accord, in other words joined souls; and 4) of one mind.

Look at verse two and following and count how many times Paul uses the word "mind"- "make my joy complete: be of the same mind (1), having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind (2). Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.

Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interest of others.

Let the same mind (3) be in you that was in Christ Jesus." Three times the word "mind" is used. Does this phrase refer to agreeing on everything? No!

But what it does mean is have a common attitude all because of our common life in Christ. Christ is the glue, even when we might disagree and have a different opinion.

That one word "mind" used twice in verse 2 is extremely important and by using it two times in this verse Paul is preparing his readers for his elaboration upon what the Christian mindset, attitude, or orientation is, beginning in Philippians 2:5: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus."

We do not know the root problem that had brought about discord in the Philippian church- maybe it was what we read in Philippians 4:2-3 where two women who had worked faithfully with Paul in the past were at odds with each other. Maybe the dissension was a result of the preaching of those who tried to bring elements of Judaism into the faith and practice of the church and who Paul lashes out in Philippians 3:1-6. Maybe it was Paul himself because folks, times haven't changed and the relationship between pastors and congregations can be very complex and can directly affect the relationships of the members to each other. Just because Paul was an Apostle did not exclude his churches from envy, jealousy, and pettiness that

causes gossip about who does and who doesn't belong in the inner circle.

And so whatever the problem, there was a problem that needed to be addressed.

Most, if not all of you received the packet of materials surrounding the recommendation from the Session, or our ruling body of officers known as Elders, to the congregation regarding the future of our church and the direction that has been cast by the leadership. Hours upon hours have been spent in prayer, discussion, debate, thinking of the processes we would use to engage the congregation whether it was the leadership and I making ourselves available the first and third Sundays after church in the parlor to address any questions or concerns you might have regarding the consultant's recommendations to a special worship service on Sunday, April 26th in our Fellowship Hall to bring you into the discussion. The elders, all of them, present at our last Session meeting signed their names in support of this recommendation. When we began this process were all the leadership

on the same page with this recommendation- asks them and those who were not will tell you NO. But over the course of time, looking at the data, praying, discussing, praying, trying to ask ourselves what is in the best interest for the Kingdom of God, what would Christ have us do, over time we have rallied around the recommendation to relocate in the future while maintaining a vital urban mission/ministry in this neighborhood. This may include an urban worshipping community as an extension of First Presbyterian Church. If you did not get the mailing you can pick one up at any of the entrances to the sanctuary and read the packet with the explanations and the process or steps outlined to fulfill this recommendation.

Did this decision take some people by surprise? I am sure. Did this decision confirm what some people already thought? I am sure. Are some people sad by the decision? YES. Are some people mad by the decision? I am sure. Are some people glad and excited about the possibilities of this decision? Yes.

There are a host of emotions running through the people of this community of faith that are real, that are genuine, that need to be recognized and honored. But, as one person e mailed me and said, "We are family" and we need to pull together, work together to further the mission and ministry of Christ church as a community of faith that has something special to offer to this greater Akron community. You are a special group of people made up of various backgrounds and abilities, made up of various socio-economic backgrounds, various cultures and various experiences. You are a special group of believers in the Lord of the Church, Jesus Christ, and we, more than ever, need to come together in Christian unity. We need to take heed to Paul's words and be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. It is the power of our Christian love that must keep us in unity. It is the fact that we share in the Holy Spirit that should keep us in unity. Friends, everything, I mean everything points to Christ- having the mind of Christ. Amen.

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Introduction: October, 1979 and Pope John II was planning to visit the United States

A parable: **no one could remember what had happened to the throne**

Do we have a "throne room" in our lives?

Philippians 2

If there was one danger that threatened the Philippian Church and that Paul was concerned over it was _____

Three main causes:

First, _____ **ambition**

Second, **the desire for** _____

Third, **a focus on** _____

"Mind"

The packet of materials surrounding the recommendation from the Session...

Conclusion: Everything points to Christ- having the mind of Christ