

Holy Trinity 30th August 2020

Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity

Philippians 2:1-13

Gospel: Matthew 21:23-32

Back in 1:27 Paul had written, 'conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ'. In essence: No one likes a hypocrite!

Here in chapter 2 he continues that theme: '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, then...' (2:1-2a)

There's a slight note of irony here. In effect he's saying, 'If these are the things you claim [united with Christ...comfort[ed] by his love... sharing in the Spirit... experiencing the character of Christ – summarised as 'tenderness and compassion'...] 'then', this is how you should behave!'

'make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.' Unity matters! '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.'

That's what you've signed up for. Because as Christians we are Jesus people. As he makes clear in verse 5: 'In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus'. What is that 'mindset'?

What Paul says next is mind-blowing. Verses 6-11 have a poetic feel. And in most Bible translations they are laid out in a 'poetic' manner. Some have suggested that they might have been some early Christian Creed.

What is the message? Well it begins, v.6, with a bold statement that Jesus is ‘in very nature God’ and yet, ‘did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage’.

We see that throughout Jesus’ life. One of His temptations, recorded in Matt. 4 and Luke 4 was to throw Himself from the ‘highest point of the temple’ in full view of the crowds – so that He would dramatically be rescued by ‘angels’ – and everyone would be forced to believe in Him. He didn’t do it. Or when He was on the Cross, where He was taunted, ‘save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!’ (Matt. 27:40) He didn’t do it. He resolutely chose not to use His power as God the Creator – simply for His own benefit. He could have avoided all the pain and torture that He experienced during the last week of His crucifixion – but He chose not to. In the words of the Christmas carol: ‘Lo, within a manger lies he who built the starry skies.’ [E. Caswall, *See, amid the winter’s snow*] Or Charles Wesley’s hymn, ‘Tis mystery all! The Immortal dies!’

In verses 7 and 8 here Paul explains what this meant in practice: ‘rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant [the Greek word actually means “slave”], being made in human likeness [that is, not appearing to be God – the “Transfiguration” is really the only occasion where His divine nature was visible]. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!’

Verses 9-11, which follow, are effectively a statement that through the Resurrection and the Ascension, God put His stamp of approval on all that Jesus did.

So what is the ‘mind[set] of Christ’? Alec Motyer sums it up well, ‘This was the mind of Christ. He looked at himself, at his Father and at us, and for obedience’ sake and for sinners’ sake he held nothing back.’

Back to verse 5, 'In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus'. Fundamental to Paul's thinking here – is 'What is the motivating power behind your life?' Someone once said, 'If you're still alive, you still have a purpose.' When we wake up in the morning – we should wake up with a sense of anticipation and even excitement – because of the opportunities to serve our God.

Which brings us to the last two verses of today's passage, verses 12 and 13. Once again, they begin with that noteworthy word, 'Therefore'. If what's just been said is true – then the following flows from it. 'Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed...' The Christian life is about 'obedience'. 'continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling'. I'll come back to that in a moment.

Verse 13 explains why, 'for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose.' The Christian's 'purpose' is to carry out God's purpose – in doing so we will find satisfaction – because it's 'his GOOD purpose'. If life seems meaningless or boring, then it's probably because we're not living it in the right attitude. Paul says, 'work out your salvation' – he's not denying our salvation. But what he is saying is that we should apply that salvation to every aspect of our lives. 'with fear and trembling'. That may sound rather tough. But, Paul is making the point as forcefully as he can, that this isn't optional for those who've chosen to obey!

We have an obligation to our Master! A Master, who has given His all for us. Who didn't use His own power and status – to His own benefit, but for us.

Today's Collect

O Lord,
we beseech you mercifully to hear the prayers of your people who call upon you;
and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do,
and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil them;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,

in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

**The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all evermore.
Amen.**