

*Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.* As I read that I remembered a BCC interview earlier this week about businesses struggling to survive under the Coronavirus restrictions and what they wanted from the Government. I don't remember the actual business of the first interview – it might have been linked to weddings or pubs – but they were facing a very difficult winter. Next up was Sir John Timpson, head of Timpson's shoe repairs and associated businesses. The interviewer gave him an opportunity to say how difficult conditions were for them; but the gist of his reply was that, though difficult, things were nowhere near as bad as they were for the first interviewee and that they were just glad that their shops could open and trade. *Looking to the interests of others:* how refreshing, I thought.

But surely there are times when we may need to look to our own interests – particularly if no-one else appears to be? When it's not wrong to be assertive? Plenty of examples of that at the moment, as the Government tries to manage this crisis, but some feel unfairly disadvantaged or excluded from assistance. The morning after the Prime Minister's address, the Radio Norfolk breakfast presenter was saying that closing pubs at 10pm didn't sound like something that would have too detrimental an impact. A taxi-driver speedily got in touch to say that his late night trade was about to evaporate. Voicing your own interest can help others get a fuller picture.

But if that's all that happens, the result is discord: everybody shouting for their own corner. Maybe that was happening among the believers in Philippi. Paul wants to stress the importance of looking *to the interests of others*: only that way will they achieve harmony.

Paul pairs this with a statement about humility: *in humility regard others as better than yourselves*. Again, is that always a virtue? I sometimes hear of people who orientate their lives around serving others; yet are prone to self-neglect: when they need care themselves, usually in old age, they can make the most difficult patients, because they don't think they deserve anything. *Regarding others as better than yourselves* shouldn't imply that we underrate ourselves: rather, that we afford an even greater respect to others. C.S. Lewis put it well: *The thing about a truly humble person is not that they think less of themselves, but that they think of themselves less*. Paul is looking for relationships at Philippi which are founded not on *selfish ambition or conceit*, but on feeling for others.

Both thinking and feeling are involved in what Paul is promoting: summed up in the word translated in our reading by *be of the same mind*. I'm not sure this necessarily implies total agreement, as much as a common attitude – and an attitude of commonality. An orchestral chord is made up of different-sounding instruments playing different notes – but it can still be harmonious. In responding to Coronavirus, although we may have radically different experiences, different levels of vulnerability, different levels of damage to our future prospects, different attitudes to risk or regulation, we still need a sense that we are in this together.

Paul doesn't just want the Philippians to be *of one mind* with one another. The way for them to achieve that, he says, is to *Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus*. The Son of God didn't lower his view of himself in becoming human; but he chose not to *exploit* that, or exalt in it for his own self-interest. Assured of his identity, he had no need to promote himself, but could look to the interests of others, *taking the form of a slave*. As a result, the God who puts down the mighty but exalts the humble *gave him the name that is above every name*. In *bending the knee* to him, we discover what true humility is. Finding our needs met in him, we are freer to look to the needs of others.

Thanks be to God.

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