

*Faith, New Providence Re-dedication  
Philippians 2: 1-12  
“On being Out of My Mind”*

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.*

Today we have heard a portion of St. Paul’s letter to the church at Philippi; very likely Paul’s favorite congregation...and I like to think that when Paul writes to the church in Philippi and says to them: “make my joy complete, be of the same mind...being in full accord and of one mind...” I like to think that Paul believed this was actually possible: that a congregation of people *could be of the same mind...and in full accord with one another.*

Whenever a bishop ordains a new pastor or installs a pastor into their new call in a congregation, the last question the bishop asks in that service is this question to the congregation:

“Will you pray for him (or her), help and honor him for his work’s sake, and in all things strive to live together in the peace and unity of Christ?”

We don’t even suggest that folks in the church are going to be of the same mind and in full accord! We’re just hoping for peace... for living together in the unity of Christ.

I guess that’s just the American reality of the church. We live in a democracy and we model church life on that. So the goal most often is to be able to get a simple majority vote on anything, or a two-thirds vote to call a pastor or change the constitution. But, *being of one mind?* and *in full accord?*...Well, St. Paul, isn’t that a missionary’s dream?

But, you do get the impression that the church at Philippi came the closest to St. Paul’s vision of any of them: the Romans, the Corinthians, Ephesians, Galatians, Colossians... they were all loved by St. Paul. But the Philippians:

*I thank my God every time I remember you, Paul wrote to the Philippians,*

*Praying with joy in every one of my prayers for you ... [Phil. 1:3-4]*

Paul loved the way those folks treated him and treated each other; but most of all, Paul loved the way the church at Philippi had *shared in the Gospel from day one until now*[Phil 1:5], toward the end of Paul’s ministry. So if Paul was going to ask any congregation to be *of the same mind, and in full accord, of one mind* – it would have to be the Philippians. Even so, it just seems to me like a very tall order.

But St. Paul is talking about something much larger than just having agreement in a congregation or keeping peace in the church. Paul is talking about how we approach life and the world and each other, this side of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Listen again to what St. Paul wrote to the church in Philippi:

*Let this same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,*

*Who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped (to be exploited),*

*But he emptied himself (poured himself out),*

*Taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness;*

*And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

*Therefore God has highly exalted him and given him the name that is above every name, That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, And every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

*Let this mind be in you, that was in Jesus Christ...* What is St. Paul saying to them, and to us? What is Paul calling us to do?

I think the simple answer is the title of the sermon: I need to get *out of my mind* – and maybe you need to get out of yours – and we need to take on the mind of Christ. So, we will all be out of our minds... but the church and the world will be far better off! There's an article for the next issue of the Lutheran:

***Bishops says that we are all out of our minds and that's a good thing.***

Let me see if I can make more sense by telling you a story. Thirty years ago, a beloved Lutheran theologian Dr. Joseph Sittler reported on his attendance at a conference of scientists – a gathering of chemists, astrophysicists, physicists, agricultural experts, and the like – a conference to discuss the obligation of the scientific community for the environment. At the end of that six-day meeting, Sittler reported, there was a press conference in which the scientists released a summary statement of their research and discussions. This, according to Sittler, was the essence of their report:

The scientists concluded, “There is much that the scientific community can do, and much more that we propose to do about the care of the environment. But no conceivable enhancement of research methodology, no conceivable addition of public funds, no cries of warning will make any considerable difference, unless we are all changed *in the spirit of our minds.*” And Sittler continued: “I doubt that they knew they were quoting St. Paul in that last phrase... but what they were pointing out is extremely important.”

Dr. Sittler went on to describe how he interpreted what the scientists were saying about changing in the spirit of our minds. Sittler said that “with our minds, we look at things, but *in the spirit of our minds*, we behold things. The difference, he said, is not just words. “To look at a thing is what psychologists call an act of perception. To behold something means to regard it in its particularity, its infinite preciousness, its irreplaceability and beauty.” [Joseph Sittler, **Gravity and Grace**, 1986 Augsburg Publishing House, p.16]

To change the spirit of your mind is not just about seeing things, but about *beholding* things, and *beholding* life, and the world, and each other. And how is that going to happen? This is why a theologian goes to a conference of scientists: because Sittler the theologian (and St. Paul the missionary pastor) can tell us exactly how that *changing the spirit of our minds* is going to take place. St. Paul wrote it to the Philippians, and this is how Joseph Sittler explains it to us:

*...the change in the spirit of our minds must come about by putting the grace of God behind the eyes with which we look at the world, and into the hands with which we touch the world.* [**Gravity and Grace**, p. 20]

And so when this parish, this Family of Faith once saw men and women in Tanzania dying of HIV and AIDS, rather than just seeing sick Africans, you were *beholding* brothers and sisters who were parents to children who would soon be orphaned if something wasn't done to build the capacity of a health clinic and strengthen other servants to treat the disease.

Or now, when the ELCA takes on the challenge of eradicating Malaria in the world, it isn't just because we see that poverty and disease go hand in hand, but we have *beheld* our friends and their infant children suffering and dying because there are not enough nets to keep the

mosquitoes from the children and enough medicine near the remote villages to treat those who are bitten.

And it's not just the nightly news stories of disasters and the like. In this State as the Lutheran Church, while others see city streets filled with crime and violence and boom boxes blasting scary noise, we *behold* Camden and parts of Newark and Elizabeth and Jersey City as homes for sisters and brothers who are working to make a difference in their neighborhoods for the old and the young and just need to know we will walk with them...and we do.

The point is this: we see life and one another differently this side of the death and resurrection of Jesus. And because Christ is alive and the Holy Spirit remains our guide and our guardian and our source of strength, we strive to *be of one mind*, and *of one accord* for the sake of the Gospel.

So, here is the question: how will you see, how will you behold the world with eyes focused by grace? And how will you touch the world with hands filled with grace?

So long as the grace of God is behind these eyes and flowing from these hands, and our hands together as church, the Kingdom of God continues to come among us and through us out into the world. And the end of it all will be pure joy. Thanks be to God. Amen.

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*September 25, 2011*