

Disciples - Surrender

Philippians 2: 1 - 11
Memorial Day

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Harold's story reminds us that surrender is at the center of Christian hope: it runs right through defeat, it brings us to the cross. We have to be willing to die in order to live. If you believe me that disciples of Jesus aren't meant to recite creeds but are meant to practice faith daily, then the practice of surrender is as important in day to day life as it is when the enemy is gazing down at us. The paradox of surrender is when you feel like you are giving up power, you are gaining the freedom to act.

Our scripture begins: If there is any encouragement in Christ...

Encouragement, which is also translated as consolation, has in its meaning a calling near, a persuasive discourse. The Greek word is *paraklasis*. A summons for help is its first meaning. Paul knows that those who seek to be in full accord have no hope of doing so without first coming near to Christ, looking to Christ for help.

We humans are held that tightly by our conflicts.

I grew up with the musicals of the seventies. Jesus Christ Superstar was the way many of my generation came to know the gospel story. When the musical was turned into a movie, the movie began with soldiers marching above ground. Then the camera enters into the below ground world of the disciples. Inside the cave we see the disciples and other followers of Jesus moving all around him with a frenetic energy, singing the words "What's the buzz, tell me what's happening." Even Mary, who cools down his face, sings and moves at the same frenetic pace.

I sent a link to you through our email devotional and for feedback's sake...how many of you clicked onto the link and saw the scene I'm talking about? If you are not on our list and would like to be, just hand me one of those cards in front of you as you leave today. The scene was full of crazy energy. That must be how we appear to God sometimes, desperately seeking answers for intractable problems, a way out of the conflict that holds us tight. Let's be clear. When the conflict is not personal, all of the problem solving skills we learned in and out of school are readily applied to find a solution. Similarly when we've found a solution to a personal problem, such as paying more attention to our spouse, we don't enter into the

crazy, frenetic energy. The craziness always happens when we experience a personal, intractable problem. Tell me what's happening!

We want to know the one thing that is causing the problem so we can fix it and fix it now. Some of us don't even mind if the problem is in ourselves. We think all we need to do is fix ourselves and the problem will go away. The other tack is to make it all about the other person. We look for ways to manipulate and change the dynamics. We look to books on management. We push away those who disagree. And dissension increases. Paul suggests a third way, and it seems ludicrous when we are caught up in the struggle. He suggests we call on Christ.

In the first part of our scripture Paul makes it clear that Christ is the one who calls us out, who enables us to enter into what he would hope for the community: If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete.

In this moment Paul does not tell them that they all must proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior... we're beyond that. Nor does he suggest they go out and make disciples of the nations. Nor does he call them to live by a set of rules. He doesn't say go read your scriptures. He doesn't command they fight against the powers of the day.

Instead, what is important to the emerging Christian community, what is essential for any people who wish to live by faith, what matters to you who are the church...is we find a way to

be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 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 interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. As we live within the shadow of yet another church leaving a denomination because they disagree about what is holy, it is clear that having the same mind, the same love, being in full accord and of one mind on some decisions is impossible in a specific time and place this side of heaven. But Paul does give us a way forward. He calls for us to be humble, to regard others as better than ourselves. It may be that one

church has a call that another one doesn't have. That call will shine through their ways of being church. It may be a minister has a call that another one doesn't have. That too will shine through in their ways of pastoring a congregation. It is surely true that each of you has a distinct call on your lives that affects the ways you see and act in the world; your politics, your commitments, your faith.

In Bible Study we get to appreciate the different minds at work. One is ready to look up the facts of the matter. Another asks questions--pushing for answers. Another one makes it personal, gets upset with God, and works out a way forward. And there are eight other approaches. They all are delightful. I think that's what Paul seeks for us...to have the same mind of Christ in that we don't get lost in the details of our own arguments but can delight in one another, can learn from one another, can cheer one another on.

Make my joy complete, trumpets Paul, never afraid to have people look at him as a source of inspiration. He understood them. He could see the good in each of them. Because of who they are in Christ, he had high expectations. Instead of saying "just get along" or "stop fighting," he issues a challenge: be in full accord and of one mind. Then he gives direction to do just that.

It starts with letting go, surrendering ambition, and releasing our own interests.

This is very, very hard. It is hard, especially in a church where our own interests are often expressed in the language of God's will. We believe we are doing God's will.

In the musical, Mary tends to Jesus, and Judas enters in:

It seems to me a strange thing mystifying, that a man like you could waste his time on women of her kind. Yes, I can understand that she amuses. But to let her kiss you, stroke your hair, is hardly in your line. It is not that I object to her profession. But she doesn't fit in well with what you do and say. It doesn't help us if you are inconsistent. They only need a small excuse to put us all away.

Does he not believe he is doing the will of God? Isn't he as worried about the movement as anyone? And yet...

Jesus shouts back, "Who are you to despise her?"

To be of one mind sometimes requires we let go of the belief we are doing right by God. It means that, at times, what we have held onto as being the way of God is instead an opinion, an expression of our

preferences based upon who we are, and what we know and do best. It is indeed a trap with which I am very familiar.

Paul knows the difficulty of what it is he is asking. He believes the Christian faith provides the way forward and allows unity that is otherwise impossible, because it is Christ alone who poured out his life. If there be any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy... be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. If Christ is alive to us, our goal is not to be right. It is to see others as Christ sees them...worth sacrificing for.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, Who, though he was in the form

Of God,

Did not regard equality with God

As something to be exploited,

But emptied himself,

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.

Christians, have the mind of Christ; be willing to sacrifice just as he did and you will be of one accord.

This is a difficult pose to bend into and to hold. It requires we be more flexible than is our tendency or desire. It means we allow someone to bend us, allow someone to take from us what once gave us our balance.

The church is definitely in view, for Paul's letter is written to a church. But the words feel as right, as applicable to life, for the practice of Christianity in the midst of life. If Christian practice can hold a church together certainly it can help our families, businesses, and communities.

Spurred on by an Arby's cup upon which was written "It's going to be a half full day," Rachel and I got to talking about what it means for a cup to be a half full or half empty. She mused that a cup is half full when you are pouring into it. When you are drinking from it, it is half empty.

I like her insight.

When we feel like we are losing something, especially a belief we've long held to, it is like the water has been poured onto the ground: wasted. We want to

take back the cup. Hold on to it. Don't let anyone touch it.

But what if, instead, we willingly poured out the contents of our cup, in obedience to what the Holy Spirit is telling us, and allowed God to fill it back up again? It takes great faith to be willing to pour out what you feel has given you life--a goal, a relationship, even a belief. Judas couldn't. Jesus did.

Walk with Jesus we proclaim this season. We have chosen to do something to get on the path with Jesus. We have allowed situations in our lives which cause us pain to be seen through the cross, the place where Jesus can meet us, and help us keep walking. We have chosen to stop disconnecting from God through our questioning, allowing God to instead form and answer the questions that matter in our hearts. This week, we are invited to sacrifice something to which we've been clinging, as the Holy Spirit commands. It is not the things we hold onto tightly that give us life; what gives us life, what gives our communities life, is our connection to God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. For Christ's sake there are times when we have to let go of that which we keep fighting to keep or do. This may be that time for you. How do you know? Well ask yourself, is there an area of your life that is matching the crazy energy of "What's the Buzz?" Chances are there's something you need to give up. And, there will be other signs. Jesus is good at sending us signs along the way if we are willing to notice them. Talk with your spiritual mentor. Take a week-end retreat. Pray. Seek clarity.

And then let go, knowing you've done what you could, pour out your cup. Walk with Jesus. And, allow God to fill you once again with that which will truly give you life.

Remember, my friends, the cross is not the end of the journey:

Therefore God also highly
 Exalted him
 And gave him the name
 That is above every name,
 So that at the name of Jesus
 Every knee should bend,
 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.

Philippians 2: 1 - 11

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 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 interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was* in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, 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.

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