

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost, Epistle, Year A

MINDED BY CHRIST

Philippians 2:1-13

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

Analysis by Bill White

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, 2 make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. 5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, 7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, 8 he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue should confess

that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

12 Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

DIAGNOSIS: Christ Mindlessness

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Mindless Witness

There is a problem in the church in Philippi. It is a problem that may be observed from time to time in virtually all congregations. The congregation's witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ is being negatively affected by internal disagreements, disharmony, and individualism (vv. 2-4).

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Mindless Faith

This problem reveals a deeper problem. What lies beneath these visible obstacles to effective Christian witness is the Philippians not having the same mind in them that was in Christ Jesus (v. 5). Having exchanged the mind of Christ (i.e., faith in Christ) for faith in something or someone other than Christ is to not have the mind of Christ. Not having the mind of Christ is misplaced faith, i.e. having no faith in Christ.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Mindless Death

Because these Philippians have abandoned the mind of Christ for something else, if nothing changes, they will be lost for all time—not only lost to Paul—but forever lost to God the Father.

PROGNOSIS: Christ-Minded

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Christ-Minded Life

But God the Father does not desire that these "Christ-mindless" Philippians (or any of us) be forever lost. God's loving desire

to rescue the lost comes 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” (vv. 7-8). Jesus gives his life on the cross for the sin of the world, including the power of sin that leads to individualism and discord. What is more, on that first Easter Sunday God “highly exalts” Jesus, raising him from the dead, “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 (vv. 9-11).

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Mind of Christ Faith

The resurrected and victorious Christ offers these Philippians (and us too!) the opportunity of another exchange. Jesus offers them faith—faith that gives the believer the mind of Christ. Jesus offers to exchange Christian faith for no faith. Jesus offers the “mind of Christ” in exchange for “Christ-less minds.” What good news! By faith believers have the same mind that was in Christ. By faith they make Paul’s joy complete; they are “of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind (v. 2).”

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Mind of Christ Witness

Even better, having the “mind of Christ” empowers the believer to heal the causes of disharmony and discord in the church, to not succumb to selfish desires and individualism, and instead to faithfully bear witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Philippians and all who have the “mind of Christ” live lives that are a faithful witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Specifically, this faith grants believers encouragement in Christ, consolation from love, a sharing in the Spirit, and Christian compassion and sympathy (v. 1). Lives that embody these traits are indeed faithful Christian witnesses!