

“What’s On Your Mind?”

Philippians 2:1-11

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4-4-04

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Did you ever get something on your mind and couldn’t get it out for a while? Perhaps an idea, or a problem which kept you awake for one night, or even a tune or a melody? Some years ago a tune got into my mind and kept playing over and over again. One day I was working in the sanctuary of the church, doing something I cannot now remember, but I noticed that tune running through my mind. And do you think it was one of the great hymns of the church? No! It was, “Haynes makes you feel good all under!” An underwear commercial!

This past week these words from Paul’s letter to the Philippians have been stuck in my mind, ringing in my ears.

“Let this same mind be among you that was in Christ Jesus. . . .”

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They have been ringing in my ears all week and they have raised a question in my mind:

What would happen if we took for ourselves the mind of Christ?

What would happen to us if we put our minds on Christ Jesus?

As Jesus comes riding into Jerusalem seated on the back of a donkey, with the people waving their palm branches, and raising their voices in shouts of acclamation, “Hosanna! Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord,” Paul’s words ring in our ears,

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 found 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.

And the question runs through my mind, “What would happen if we really got Jesus on our minds? If we made the mind of Christ our minds? If we let the same mind that lived in Christ live in us?

Maybe we would learn something about humility. We live in a society which has

almost forgotten what humility looks like. Our world encourages competition, striving with one another, climbing the ladder, stepping on people to get ahead, touting yourself and your plans and your accomplishments. In our world athletes strut around the arenas showing off their stuff, and multimillionaires set themselves up as the examples of what we are all supposed to become.

An article in Friday's *Columbia Tribune* newspaper told the story of John Q. Hammons who grew up in the little town of Fairview, just outside of Springfield, graduated from Southwest Missouri State University, and made a fortune in real estate development and building hotels. "I always wanted to be different. I wanted to create something new." "I can see into the future and plan. I like to create things differently, and I do." When Springfield city leaders struggled over the past fifteen years but failed in their plans to build a stadium and bring a team to that city, Hammons put forth his own plan in the year 2000. "I watched them while they were doing it. Then, when I saw it wasn't going to happen, I decided to do it." And so he got the city to buy 100 acres of land and he put up \$20 million in bonds and built an 8,000 seat stadium and named it after himself. And he promises to bring a team to Springfield by this time next year. Some baseball people say it won't be easy, but Hammons says, "I will have a Double-A team here next April, but I can't tell you who it is going to be."¹

Now, I am not here to criticize Mr. Hammons; I don't know the man, he may be the most humble man in the world. My hat is off to him, because he is evidently a man who can put his mind to something and get things done. But his story just makes me wonder what would happen to if we learned to put our minds on the life of Jesus and began to learn how to live like him.

Remember the humble spirit of Jesus? Remember when the young man came to Jesus one day with a question about eternal life? "Good teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life." Jesus answered his question, but before he did, he said to the young man, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone." What would happen if we learned something of the humble spirit of Jesus?

What would happen if put aside some of our religious arrogance and learned some of the humility of Jesus? What would happen to the religious climate of our country if we stopped thinking that we have God all figured out, if we stopped acting like everyone who does not think and talk and act like we do in church, who does not read the Bible the same way we do, who does not believe everything in the Bible the same way that we do is condemned to hell? What would happen if we learned some of the humility of Christ?

Some years ago John Templeton, founder of the Templeton Fund for higher education and character development wrote a book of theology which he called *The Humble Approach*. What a novel idea! At the heart of any theology worth a hill of beans is such a humble

attitude, which begins with an admission of its own limitation. Anything else is idolatry!

What would happen if we took upon ourselves the mind of Christ? Perhaps we would discover some of the joy found in a life of service!

Perhaps you are old enough to remember the song which Glenn Campbell made famous in the middle 1960's. It was written by a folk singer named John Hartford and recorded by Campbell and rose up the charts of popular music in 1967 and 1968. It was "Gentle on My Mind" – perhaps you remember it.

It's knowing that your door is always open
and your path is free to walk,
that makes me tend to leave my sleeping bag
rolled up and stashed behind your couch.

And it's knowing I'm not shackled
by forgotten words and bonds
and the ink stains that have dried if on some line,
that keeps you in the back roads by the rivers of my mem'ry
that keeps you ever gentle on my mind.

It's not clinging to the rocks and ivy
planted on the columns now that binds me,
or something that somebody said
because they thought we fit together walking.
It's just knowing that the world will not be cursing
or forgiving when I walk along some railroad track
and find that you are moving on the back roads
by the rivers of my mem'ry
and for hours you're just gentle on my mind.

I can still hear Glenn Campbell singing it as I drive my '64 Ford Falcon down Highway 66!
And I wonder what happened to John Hartford, maybe he still out there wandering around,
walking down the road because he wasn't interested in serving anyone but himself.
Probably he lives in a big Hollywood mansion, laughing every day on the way to bank to
count his money.

In contrast to that self-centered, self-serving attitude, the Apostle Paul was talking
about a totally different mind-set, a life of caring and commitment and service inspired by
the life of Jesus.

The ancient Christian hymn which the Apostle Paul inserted into his letter to the Philippians declares that Jesus “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave.” Some of the older translations render the word, “servant,” but the New Testament Greek word is *doulos*, the same word which is often used to talk about slaves and masters. The literal reading of the Greek says, “But he poured out himself the form of a slave taking.”

Who wants to become a slave? Not !! Many of our brothers and sisters have struggled in this land hundreds of years to escape the chains of political, economic and social slavery. Who wants to go back to those days?

We were talking at our table last Monday night at the Jewish – Christian dialogue about keeping the ten commandments, and about how difficult it is keep the Sabbath. In this secular society it is very difficult to put aside the regular routine of work for a day of rest and renewal. One of our Jewish friends said she puts it into the perspective of the very first commandment, “I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the land of slavery” She explains to her non-Jewish friends that keeping the Sabbath is an important time when she is no longer a slave to the pressures of work; when she is not a slave to the pressures of teenage daughter who thinks that she must take her to mall every Saturday; when she is not a slave to kitchen; when she is not a slave to the pressure of this society which says that our lives do not count unless we are producing or consuming something. Keeping the Sabbath is a way of escaping slavery at least one day every week. We who are Christians would do well to learn about the importance of our faith from these mothers and fathers in our faith.

None of us want to go back to slavery, slavery to the world! But that not is what Paul is talking about. He was talking about becoming slaves of one another, servants of one another in the spirit of love. He was talking about a life in which we are freed from slavery to the things of the world, free to love and serve and live in the joy of the spirit of Christ Jesus.

Think about what would happen if we took upon ourselves the mind of service which we have in Christ Jesus! The famous Albert Schweitzer was asked to give a commencement address to an American university while on his trip to this country. Among the things which he told the graduates that day was this, “I don’t know what your destiny in life will be, but this I do know. Those of you who find out how to serve will be the happiest!” Those of us who find out how to get outside ourselves, and discover how to serve in Jesus’ spirit of love and humility will discover great joy.

What would happen if we took for ourselves the mind of Christ? If we put our minds on Christ Jesus?

You have heard it said that only left-handed people are in their right minds! That’s

not quite right! Paul would say that only Jesus-minded people are in their right minds! If we ever took upon ourselves the mind of Christ Jesus we would finally come to our right minds! And we might discover the mind of God.

In his little book, *Taste and See*, William O. Paulsell, Disciple Minister, and retired President of Lexington Theological Seminary tells the story of a which comes from Eastern Orthodox Christianity dating back at least until the fifth century. Various called the Jesus Prayer, or the Prayer of the Heart, it is a simple thought, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner,” it was often adjusted to “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me,” or simply, “Christ have mercy.” In recent years Marcus Borg modified it to say, “Lord Jesus Christ, you are the light of the world. Fill my mind with your peace and my heart with your love.”

This prayer produced a substantial amount of literature, from a document known as the *Philokalia*, written in the 14th and 15th centuries to a popular book, *The Way of the Pilgrim* which appeared in Russia in the 19th century telling the travels and adventures of a Russian peasant who entered a church one day and heard the priest read the admonition “pray without ceasing,” from 1 Thessalonians 5:17, and he began to wonder how it would be possible for anyone to do this. He eventually encountered a Russian spiritual teacher who taught him the Jesus Prayer, and under the guidance of this man worked his way up to praying the Jesus Prayer twelve thousand times a time. Eventually he found that he did not have to make a conscious effort to pray it, but the prayer simply prayed itself in his heart, and he discovered that, “It gladdened and comforted me in all my wanderings. . . .”

Recently a little novel by J.D. Salinger, *Franny and Zooey* tells the story of a college student who was introduced to the Jesus Prayer in a religion class, who tries to explain to her skeptical boyfriend the use of the prayer. When he asks the purpose of it, she replies, “You get to see God. Something happens in some absolutely nonphysical part of the heart – where the Hindus say the Atman resides, if you ever took any Religion – and you see God, that’s all.”²

What would happen if we really let the mind of Christ Jesus be alive among us? I would like to find out, wouldn’t you?

1. *Columbia Daily Tribune*, p. 4B, Friday, April 2, 2004.
2. William O. Paulsell, *Taste and See: A Personal Guide to the Spiritual Life*, Eugene Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, pp 58 - 60.