

SERMON:

In Humility, September 27, 2026 sermon by Rev. R. Randy Day

Scripture reading: Philippians 2: 1–13 And Mathew 21:23–32

We're going to focus for a few minutes on Philippians this morning. As usual, I checked out a number of commentaries, and I found one from Ryan Schellenberg at Luther Seminary. I know we have some Lutherans here.

Schellenberg says the poetic narrative of Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, and exaltation in the passage from Philippians is the most famous, or one of the most famous, passages of all of Paul's writings, which, you know, make up a good bit of the New Testament. So that's a lot.

It is often referred to as the "Christ hymn," since many interpreters believe that Paul used a hymn that was being sung in some of these very early churches and incorporated it into his letter. So the second half of what I just read is seen as a hymn. Other commentators say, "No, no, Paul wrote this himself." So we don't really know.

But it is intriguing to think about the early church and what liturgies were, and hymns, and, you know, they were gathering around often in homes or wherever they were meeting. What did they do? What was the liturgy like? You know, this is the very beginning of the church as they gathered together.

In some places, it wasn't very safe when they gathered together, but they seemed to come down to some of the basics about what had happened to Jesus, and they put it into what appears to be a hymn. So maybe it was being used in many different churches at the time. Paul had heard it, and he swept it up and put it into this letter.

Now, Dr. Derek Weber, a British Methodist who has a PhD from the University of Edinburgh, says Paul seems to be very concerned about thinking. Maybe that's because he's in prison and he has a lot of time to think. I like that. Any of you been in prison? Don't raise your hands.

In the first few verses of this passage, he tells us that we should think alike and think like Christ, be in the mind of Christ. But being in the mind of Christ is kind of hard to understand. What on earth does that mean?

He says it doesn't mean that we stifle creativity. It doesn't mean we all have to be alike, homogeneous Christians. Nope, not saying that at all. He's really saying we want to celebrate the differences in the church, which are huge differences now that we are a global church and have been for quite some time. We want all of that diversity, and even here in our own country, lots of diversity that is to be celebrated.

So it doesn't mean that we want everyone to have groupthink. Not at all, not at all. He's not trying to remove all the differences in the body of Christ. This professor says those differences make us a very rich tapestry, which we've talked about here many, many times. Finding new perspectives and new ways of looking at the same things is part of the excitement of being in a community.

And, you know, it's funny. We have Game Day, and people say, "Well, what's religious about that?" There was a sense of community during Game Day, and I'm sure we had lots of Jewish participants, lots of Catholic participants. At one point, when we were thanking them for all this (pointing to non-foods charitable donations), "All of you from Christ the King, can you raise your hand?" A whole bunch of people raised their hands.

So we said, "Oh, we enjoy working with you." There were lots of Catholics there, all kinds of folks, and that we grasp and that we understand and we find very, very exciting.

So, an invitation to think as Christ does. That's what the song here seems to say. And this commentator went on to say, and others have said, to be in the mind of Christ is something you have to concentrate on and work on day by day, and it's really best to start first thing in the morning.

"I'm going to be in the mind of Christ today," and you get that in your brain with your early tea or coffee, and then you have a better chance of implementing that as you go through the day, which may be a passive day, it may be a hectic day. No day is ever the same.

You know, I traveled the world for the United Methodist Church, and some of the best memories I have were in small churches and also in the rural areas and also with missionaries. Not all the missionaries came from the United States. They came from Asia and Africa. There were European missionaries in the Caribbean. It was a wonderful mix.

But often I stayed with these folks, and the first thing you did in the morning, you come out, and it's like, "Where's the coffee?", but first you sit around the little kitchen table or whatever table they had, and you had devotions. Usually they were couples, not always, and one of them would read a short devotion, and one of them would say a prayer.

And you could hear the roosters out in the yard, you could hear some voices of people getting up early and walking, maybe to the market or wherever. These were mostly tropical places with open windows and birds flying. I just love mornings. But the devotions really helped me, and I guess that helped them as a practice to focus on the mind of Christ for the day, whatever the events of the day may come before you.

And again, there are always surprises. There are storms in the skies and in the waterways, and there are emotional storms in our own lives. You never know what the day is going to bring. So, starting out with some devotions is a good thing, and I know many of you probably do exactly that.

So Paul is saying that we want to be in the mind of Christ. We want to have the creativity. We want to understand what he went through. And we also know that many of the people at the time were really living in fear, physical fear, not the Hebrew sense of fear, that we fear the God who's awesome. I've talked about that before, but the real, real kind of fear, like being afraid of a fire or a snake.

They were afraid of the authorities. So he's saying Jesus also was humiliated to the point of being crucified, being crucified on a cross. When he says that, he's really trying to fortify these new Christians. When he's writing to the Philippians, he's trying to fortify them, to try to strengthen their faith in order to move ahead, in order to press on.

So, what does the Mashpee Congregational Church, or any other church of any faith, whatever around the world, what does it mean to press on together in terms of the Scripture? What do we mean, press on together? What does it take to be a community?

Well, I think we have a good example from all of this that came in the other day. It came in on Friday, and then all the other missions that we're doing. We may be a small church, but my goodness, we're reaching out here, reaching out there. Habitat, Baby Center, on and on and on. The hospital in Mozambique. We've touched many, many lives, and we will continue to do that.

Knowing many of you who watch us virtually have supported these missions in many, many different ways, with gifts and with prayers. We're most appreciative.

And the hymns that we sing together today pull us across different generations. They pull us together from different walks of life. So hymns have been very, very important. We talk about thinking the mind of Christ, being in the mind of Christ. The hymn writers have taken such a lead through the history of Christianity, some of them writing the words, others writing the music, some writing both.

So we've had these powerful hymns. Some of the ones we're singing today are very familiar. We love them. Thanks to Richard, we're learning some new ones.

So it's a way for us to understand the grace of God working among us.

One of the last points to make here is he talks a lot about humility. My goodness, it seems like we ought to be reading this passage over and over. I don't find a lot of humility in many of the leaders—some church leaders, some business leaders, and certainly political leaders. Where the heck's the humility? Where's the grace? It's really not there, and the church can't be quiet about that.

The church needs to pick up, you know, this passage. A couple of historians point out that this passage was used to really keep down the poor people, or maybe the people of a different race, and certainly the slaves. So those who had the power often talked about the humility. "You all need to be humble."

Well, that's humility without grace. That's not what we're talking about. We're not talking about subjugating other people. This humility is for all of us, and rather than trying to see it in a power move to move on others, why don't we take a look at ourselves? How are we doing with this humility thing?

I remember a long time ago somebody told me that pastors ought to tell every—back when we called them secretaries, and they were mostly female. This was my starting out—that every secretary or administrator should have a mirror on her or his desk when they answer the phone, because you never know who's calling. It could be a potential new member, a potential new choir member. You want to answer the phone with a sense of friendliness because you're representing the church.

Same as when we go out in the community, we're representing the church. What do people see on our faces, and are we acting with humility and with grace? If we do, I think we will be very successful in honoring God.

You know, Charles Wesley seemed to understand this when he was writing a lot of hymns, including the one we're about to sing. He actually wrote a lot of the hymns while he was on horseback. He rides a horse. Yeah. Okay. He rides a horse, so they didn't have cars and buggies. And I guess they had buggies, but he was all over London, all over England, Scotland, Wales, and he was using a lot of the tunes from the local pubs, the bars. That was the popular music.

So the whole idea today, using popular music—they were doing that in the 1700s and even before that. So we take these popular tunes from the pubs that were known by the people, and he wrote religious words as he was riding along on his horse from one appointment to the next.

"O for a thousand tongues to sing,
my great Redeemer's praise,

the glories of my God and King,
the triumphs of God's grace."

He nails it. It's the triumphs of God's grace that keeps all of us going.

Amen. Let's sing.