In 458 BC, Rome was facing a military crisis
that threatened to destroy the republic.
The Roman Senate took a desperate step:
they called upon a retired general and statesman named Cincinnatus.
They granted him the title of Dictator,
giving him absolute, unchecked authority**.**
When the messengers arrived,
they found him working in his fields, covered in dirt.
Cincinnatus left his plow,
took total command of the armies,
and completely defeated the enemy forces in just 15 days.

That is pretty impressive, right?
But guess what happens next?
Something even more impressive…
At that moment, Cincinnatus was
the most powerful man in the known world.
He could have easily kept his absolute power.
Society expected him to climb the ladder of ambition.
Instead, just 16 days after taking power,
with the crisis resolved,
Cincinnatus resigned his dictatorship.
He stripped himself of his royal authority,
disbanded his army, and returned to his farm
to pick up his plow where he left it.
He completely emptied himself of all status.

Because he refused to cling to power
and willingly went low, Cincinnatus achieved
a legendary status that outshone any emperor.
He was exalted by history.
For over two thousand years,
he has been revered as the ultimate
symbol of civic virtue and humility.
In fact, centuries later, when George Washington
gave up his military command and refused a third term as US President,
his contemporaries explicitly exalted
Washington as the "American Cincinnatus,"
naming the city of Cincinnati, Ohio, in honor of this ideal.

Cincinnatus traded a dictator's robes for a farmer's plow,

sacrificing his status for the sake of his people.
Today, as we open our Bibles to Philippians 2,
we are going to look at the One who traded
the throne of heaven for a Roman cross—
and discover why we must be empty to be exalted.

Empty to be Exalted.
Paul seems very focused on this idea as he
continues to think and write in prison.
And in Paul's points, he gives us his thoughts about how to press on.

If, then, there is any comfort in Christ, any consolation from love, any partnership in the Spirit, any tender affection and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Be of the same mind.
Whose mind? My mind? Your mind?
No, he will continue on and tell us whose mind we should be in…
but first, what being in that mind is like
Do nothing from selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. 2:3

Then whose mind…
Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, 2:5

In the first few verses,
Paul tells us to think alike and think as Christ does.
But "Being of the same mind"
doesn't stifle differences of opinion.
He isn't trying to remove all differences in the body of Christ.
Those differences make us the rich tapestry we are.

So, what does he mean by "having the same mind"?
How can a diverse collection of humanity—
like the church—ever hope to achieve unity of thought?
We are too different, have too many varied experiences
and backgrounds to hope to think alike on any issue of substance. Don't you think?
Yes. But Paul has a solution.
We find it back in verse 5.
Wake up in the morning with your mind stayed on Christ.
Do you know that spiritual?

<u>The first line goes "Woke up this mornin' with my mind..."</u> (The Faith We Sing, 2082).
Stop there for a moment.
Woke up with my mind?
That is where we need to start.

The song and the scriptures invite us to think as Christ does.
The song, while it pauses at the end of the first line,
goes on to make a very profound statement:
and it was stayed on Jesus."
or some versions simply say, "with my mind set on Jesus.
That asks a question of us…
Is your mind stayin on Jesus
from the very moment you start your day?

It's an early morning act of faith.
It is claiming Christ first thing.
It is claiming that living the day that lies ahead
in the way we say we want to live
is possible only by focusing on the mind of Christ.
That is exactly what Paul's point is to us here.
Empty your mind so you can be filled
with the mind of Christ Jesus

<u>who, though he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped,</u>

Cincinnatus stepped down from
a temporary human throne to plow dirt.
Washington left office for his beloved Mt. Vernon.
But Jesus stepped down from an eternal,
divine throne to enter our dirt.
Jesus, possessing the ultimate status of equality with God,
"did not use it to his own advantage".

<u>but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, assuming human likeness. And being found in appearance as a human,2:7</u>
<u>he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death-- even death on a cross.2:8</u>
Let's take a survey…
How many of you like to ease your way into a swimming pool?
How many of you like to plunge in?
Jesus didn't just dip His toes into human suffering. Right?

Philippians 2:7–8 says He emptied Himself
and humbled Himself by becoming obedient
to the point of death—even death on a cross.
He allowed the crushing weight of our sin
to take Him to the absolute lowest, darkest place imaginable.

He was emptied for us.
When Jesus was called in to serve,
he left the heavenly host and his status
as God behind to become human like us.
And what did he do as a human?
He humbled himself, which Paul says to us
is how you live into being in the same mind as Jesus.
He wants us to think as Christ does.

Paul tells us earlier
Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others. 2:4
Paul is particularly interested in humility:
"set yourself aside."
Set aside your need to be right.
Set aside your need to have it your way.
Set aside ...
Wouldn't it be wonderful if those who
claimed to be followers of Christ—
in business, in politics, in the church—
would set their minds on Christ and embrace humility,
self-sacrifice, and a desire for unity and hope?

On Friday, we remembered the 25th anniversary
of the day that changed our world in America forever.
And as I remembered 9/11, I read once again
stories of heroes among the over 300 firefighters lost.
The police and port authority,
as well as the 500,000 evacuated by calling all boats.
But as I was watching College GameDay yesterday,
I saw a story you may not have heard of either

About the man in the red bandana: Welles Remy Crowther.
Wells grew up 30 miles outside New York City.
His trademark smile was always complemented
by the red bandana he carried in his pocket.

When Wells was a little boy,
his dad took a little white handkerchief,
folded it up, and put it in his pocket and said,
"Now, Wells, this white handkerchief, that's for show.
Here's a bandana that's for blow."
He loved having that red bandana,
and he always had it with him.

A natural leader and athlete,
Wells played lacrosse at Boston College
before graduating in 1999.
By 2001, he was a volunteer firefighter
and an equities trader on the 104th
floor of the South Tower at the World Trade Center.
Then, on September 11th, the world changed.
He called his mom: this is Well, I want you to know that I'm okay.

Later, South Tower survivors said…
We looked around the floor.
We really can't move
because we don't know what happened.
We were afraid to take a step.
Then all of a sudden, we saw a young man come out of nowhere.
We heard this man's voice say,
"I found the stairs. Follow me.

It's the way he said it.
And we just got up. We followed.
That voice belonged to Wells,
who led survivors from the 78th floor to the 61st,
where firefighters met them and escorted them safely to the ground.
All except Wells, who climbed back up the stairs
and continued to help until he no longer could
as the South Tower came down.
He was 24 years old.
In the days that followed, survivor accounts
started appearing in news stories.
referencing being saved by a man in a red bandana.
Wells was credited with saving
as many as 18 lives that day.
Even though they didn’t know his name

or where he came from,
they knew the man in the red bandana had saved their lives.
Later at home, they found his application
for the NY fire department among his belongings.

And it was amazing to see how Welles,
after his sacrifice for others,
has been exalted and remembered through
the Red Bandana game at Boston College
on Sept. 11 every year since 2014.
And how the red bandana has
become a symbol of service and sacrifice.

What would cause this young man
and many others not only to lead others to safety,
but to keep going back in to help others?
I don't know; maybe it was the mind that is in Christ Jesus.
Emptied to be exalted.
And Paul says the same about Jesus.
The story didn't end in the depths of the grave.
Because Jesus surrendered to the bottom,
verses 9–11 tell us that "**Therefore God exalted him even more highly and gave him the name that is above every other name,**

In God's kingdom, the only way up is down.
Jesus had to be completely emptied
so that He could be maximally exalted.
so that at the name given to Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

Rome exalted Cincinnatus with a parade and a legacy;
our country honors George Washington
as one of the greatest men who has ever led our country,
and rightly so, but God exalted Jesus
to the highest place in the universe.
Because Jesus was willing to go to the absolute bottom,
God raised Him up so that every knee should bow
and **every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.2:11**

Tomorrow morning, you will walk into
your workplace, your school, or your home.

The culture around you will tempt you
to promote yourself, protect your reputation,
and demand your rights.
But I want to challenge you this week
to play the part of Cincinnatus—
better yet, to play the part of Jesus.

What if you found one practical way this week to intentionally take the lower place?
Take the task nobody else wants.
Give credit to a coworker instead of taking it for yourself.
Quietly serve someone who can do
absolutely nothing for you in return.

To empty yourself of the need to be noticed.
Let Jesus be your defender and your promoter,
because the promise of God's Word remains absolute:
Those who empty and humble themselves will be exalted.