



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

September 28, 2008

## Proper 21A - Think Like Jesus Thinks

Reverend Donna Barr

The Christian Church has never had a perfect record. If you take a random sample of the adjectives people use to describe the church, the list will likely include such labels as racist, judgmental, narrow, divided, and pompous. The Church of Jesus Christ has fallen far short of the ideals he entrusted to it - so far short that we may sometimes forget what the church is supposed to look like. And even who Jesus Christ looks like.

Occasionally, however, a church comes along that works, against all odds. Philippi was one of those rare congregations.

When Paul wrote the church, he could hardly find words warm enough to express his pride and affection. He trusted the Philippians. At least four separate times they sacrificed to meet his needs. Paul wrote this letter, mainly as a thank you note for all that his friends had done. His letter reveals his confidence in his Lord and his joyful faith even in his imprisonment.

The second chapter which we read this morning is a message about Christ. Jesus is the focus of a healthy and growing church. Jesus was the focus at Philippi. Christianity did not begin with a theological formulation, a set of laws, or even a prayer form. It certainly did not begin with a document. It began with a person. Paul knew that to follow Christ the Church had to be committed to the person of Jesus Christ.

Paul tells them they should strive to be of the same mind as Christ. They are to think Christ like things. Not WWJD, What Would Jesus Do, but Paul says TLJT, Think Like Jesus Thinks. Then, to give an example of what it means to think like Jesus, Paul quotes what is widely believed to be a hymn already known to the Philippians. He writes the brief intro "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus," and then jumps into a hymn,

“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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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. “

Paul then uses the hymn to push his message home to the Christians in Philippi, calling them to greater obedience to God. He calls them to work on obedience with fear and trembling, for it is God who will enable them to do his will. So for Paul, to know God is to know how God has acted in the past. We know that God took the form of a servant when he was born in human likeness. God humbled himself in the person of Jesus. It was through that humble obedience that Jesus came to be exalted. We know God through God's actions and God, despite all reason, was humble. How much more then should we work to be humbly obedient. Jesus became the servant of all. How can we then not put ourselves at the service of others?

If you want to think like Jesus thinks, think of how you can be of service to others. How can you reach out to show God's love for those around you?

Paul tells us today in no uncertain terms that we are to strive to have the same mind in us that was in Christ Jesus.

The Rev. Frank Logue tells about a sermon delivered by the former Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey. In the sermon he mentioned the ministry of Ted Karpf, an assistant to The Archbishop of Capetown, South Africa. Ted was helping the Anglican Church in South Africa combat the AIDS pandemic.

Twenty years before, Ted knew almost nothing of AIDS other than fear and half truths. It was in 1983, while Ted was working as a priest in the diocese of Dallas in Texas, that the problem of AIDS landed on his doorstep quite literally. Ted answered his door one night to find standing there a man with his face disfigured by the cancerous sores associated with advanced stages of the HIV/AIDS virus. The man said simply: “Will you allow

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me to come to your church and die here?' He went on to explain that six other churches had already turned him away.

The first thing Ted thought was of the terrible disease and the uncertainties of how it spread. What would it mean for this man to share in the worship at his church? He thought if you drank from a communion cup with someone that has this disease you too would contract the virus. But Ted stopped long enough to Think Like Jesus Thinks. Ted thought of how Jesus welcomed the outcasts in his own society, especially the lepers who others avoided out of fear of the disease. After an initial pause, Ted said, "My church is open to you. I will stand by you."

Later, Ted would learn that the man only wanted to place to commit suicide. However, when he realized that Ted actually intended to show him love and care, the man put aside his thoughts of ending his own life. Miracle of miracles, a church was offering love and support rather than judgment and condemnation.

The only problem was that Ted's church could not see it the same way. The issue was not inclusion or exclusion, but fear. Fear of AIDS and what it could do to a person. Ted reached out in love to a dying man and the people of his congregation abandoned their church and that dying man. A few months later, there were only 21 people remaining in Ted's church. At one main Sunday service, only three people attended. Ted saw no choice but to stand by the dying man offering him the love of God.

Time passed. The disease ran its course and the man died still upheld by the love of Ted and the few who stood by him. There was no small cost to Thinking Like Jesus Thinks, but the faithful Christians felt they had no other choice. How could they not humble themselves to be of service to someone in need? I do not know where Thinking Like Jesus Thinks might lead us, as St. John's Church at Versailles. I imagine we will be lead to some uncomfortable circumstances. But if we want to take your Christian faith seriously, we will have to strive to have the same mind that is in Christ Jesus. We must endeavor to Think Like Jesus Thinks. Self ambition, conceit, pride, arrogance, looking to our own interest—these are the thoughts of men. Therefore, brothers and sisters, humility and unconditional love are the thoughts of God. Let us think not of own interest, but also to the interests of others. Think Like Jesus Thinks.

Amen

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