

Make My Joy Complete

Hespeler, September 27, 2026 © Scott McAndless – Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32, Psalm 25:1-9, Philippians 2:1-13, Matthew 21:23-32

The Apostle Paul loved the people in the church in Philippi. Even though he was in prison when he wrote to them, and it was probably dangerous to do so, they supported him freely. The joy that he takes in them comes across on every page of this letter.

But for Paul, something was still missing. The church in Philippi was not united. They were disagreeing and arguing with one another. Perhaps they even had differences over their support for Paul.

And so, in his letter, he entreats them saying, **“make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.”**

And I do not think that Paul is speaking only for himself here, nor is he just speaking to the situation in Philippi. This is also Jesus Christ’s priority for the church. It is Jesus’ priority for us.

What Jesus Delights in

Jesus takes delight in many things in the life of our congregation. Jesus loves it when we worship with full hearts. Jesus loves our joyful music. And when he sees us doing what we can to feed the hungry, to offer clothing to those who do not have enough, Jesus is ecstatic. When we welcome people as they are, when we listen to their problems to connect them to people who can help them find solutions, it warms Jesus’ heart.

But Jesus never stops looking for that one more thing that would make all of his joy in us complete. He wants us to be united, to share the same mind and the same love and be in perfect accord.

Completing Jesus’ Joy

That is more important to Jesus than that we be seen as successful as a church, or that our pews be full, or that we meet our budget. Just us being united in one mind is enough to bring to Jesus utter and complete joy.

And surely you all want that, don’t you? Just think, you have the power to give to Jesus a joy that is complete in every way. How could you not want to do that?

But there is one problem, isn’t there? We are all different. We all have different concerns, different worries, opinions and priorities. How can we put all of that aside to create that one-mindedness that will complete Jesus’ joy?

Practical Advice

Well, fortunately the Apostle Paul doesn’t leave us hanging on that account. He tells us how we can do that seemingly impossible thing. He starts with some real practical advice. **“Do nothing from selfish ambition or empty conceit,”** he writes, **“but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of**



you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others.”

And that is all really good. But I know, and I imagine that you also know, that that is often easier said than done. There are times when, for example, I act in selfish ways or in ways that are only concerned with my own ambition, but I am not always aware of it when I do that. It can also often be very easy to confuse my own interests with the interests of someone else. We are just human after all, and we make those kinds of mistakes all the time.

Same-Mindedness

So, Paul gives us the tool that will allow us to find that same-mindedness. And it is a tool that is available to all of us as followers of Christ. **“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,”** he says.

That makes a certain kind of sense, doesn't it? If we can all manage to let the mind of Christ enter into us, well, then we will all automatically have the same mind, won't we?

The Mind of Christ

That just leaves one niggling little question. How do we get the mind of Christ into us? It can't be a question of intellect. We can't all get as smart as Jesus because he surely has depths of knowledge and understanding that none of us can attain.

But don't worry, Paul is not done. He goes on to tell us exactly what he means by the mind of Christ. The passage that follows is truly remarkable because most biblical scholars agree that Paul didn't write it. He seems to be quoting something to them that they have heard before. It is probably a hymn or song that they sing as part of the life of their church.

Ancient Hymn

The Letter to the Philippians was probably written sometime around 60 AD, maybe thirty years after Jesus' resurrection. But this hymn that Paul quotes is older than that. It has been around long enough to be well known and familiar to everyone. So it might have been written much closer to the time of Jesus.

It could be older than all of the Gospels, older than most of the Letters of Paul. It might even be one of the first things that anybody ever wrote down about Jesus. That is quite something to consider!

And I would, in fact, encourage you to take some time to consider this extraordinary passage. Meditate on it. It will reveal to you aspects of the person of Jesus that probably never occurred to you before.

The Story of the Christ

It is a hymn that celebrates the story of the Christ, but not the story as we usually tell it. There is nothing about a birth in a manger or a ministry in Galilee. It is rather the story of the cosmic Christ. It begins with Jesus being in the presence of God and having the very form of God. Apparently, for Jesus, equality with God is something that is within his grasp.

But having all of that, Jesus simply gives it up. Rather than seizing all of the rights of divinity, as he could, he lets go of it. He empties himself. It is literally the same word you would use for pouring

water out of a cup or emptying a bucket. Jesus then takes on a new form, a human form. But not just human, specifically the form of a human who is a slave.

The Twist

And then, of course, comes the big twist in the story of Jesus. Having become a slave, he is exalted and given a name that is higher than any other name in all of creation, a name so exalted that, at the sound of it, every being on earth, in heaven and under the earth will spontaneously bow down.

And why is Jesus given such an exalted title? Is it because of that whole part about him starting out in the very form of God? Is it his divinity that provokes such a reaction?

No, not at all. It is rather his extreme humility, service and obedience that cause God to exalt him. And Paul adds the point, probably the only words in this hymn that he added himself, that this service and obedience were so extreme that they included Jesus' death on a cross.

Paul doesn't tell us what the mind of Christ is. Instead, he points us to this extraordinary poem about the story of Jesus. And I believe that right here you will find directions for how you can have the mind of Christ in you.

Original Nature

The poem starts with a statement of the original nature of Christ. **"He existed in the form of God."** And for you, having the mind of Christ has to begin with an understanding of your true nature. And no, you are not in the form of God. That is something unique about Christ. But I'll tell you what you are.

You are created in the image of God. That is something common to all humanity. You are also beloved of God. You are someone for whose sake Jesus was willing to suffer death, even death on a cross. You are someone chosen, redeemed and saved by God through Jesus Christ. All of that has been given to you, not because you deserve it, but because you are willing to put your trust in Jesus and what he has done for you.

Having the mind of Christ begins by making that the foundation of your identity and self-worth. There are many other things about you that make you special and unique, and God loves all you accomplish through them. But knowing that this is the foundation of your self-worth means that you cannot think more highly of yourself than the others in your church who have the same foundation of their worth.

Not Grasping

So, you start by knowing who you are in Christ. The next step to obtaining the mind of Christ is to choose, like Jesus, not to grasp that worth, but to be willing to set it aside. Empty yourself of it. That does not mean that you forget your true worth, of course. Jesus never forgot where he came from. But it does mean that you choose, like him, to devote that worth to service and obedience.

Jesus taught us again and again that we attain our greatest power through service. **"Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant,"** he said, **"and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave."** (Matthew 20:26-27) And I realize that choosing to serve does not always come easy. Not all of us are equipped to serve in every way, and it may take some

discernment to find a place where you can serve. But when you do, Paul's promise is that you will find that the mind of Christ forming in you.

Choosing Service

How many in this church have found that place where they fit in, whether it be in offering food to the hungry, or leading in worship, serving as an elder or deacon, or in so many other ways? I have seen how you have deepened in your faith and grown in compassion as you have done these things. This is the mind of Christ growing in you.

Exaltation

So, you develop the mind of Christ in yourself by knowing who you are and choosing to put who you are to work in acts of service. But there is one more verse in the hymn that we need to cover. For, even as Jesus was exalted and given a name that is above every other name, we are given a share in that exaltation.

And yes, part of that is that have the hope and expectation that after we die, we will be raised up to a new life in an existence far beyond our present understanding or imagination. That hope sustains us even through the darkest times of this life. And knowing that hope is a part of having the mind of Christ.

Owning the Name

But remember always that this exaltation is not just for another life. For in this world, we claim the exalted title of Christ. That is what we mean when we call ourselves Christians. Owning that name and being able to carry it in this world is something we should cherish always. We have a share in that name that is exalted above every other name in heaven, on earth and under the earth.

And sure, not everyone we meet will recognize the importance of that name. But we know, don't we? And that knowledge contributes to us having the mind of Christ.

So, when you understand what Paul means by having the mind of Christ, you realize that it is something we can attain in this world. So long as you know the foundation of your worth, so long as you embrace the role of service for which the Holy Spirit has equipped you, and so long as you hold onto the hope and power that is in the exalted name of Jesus the Christ, the mind of Christ will be found in you.

So, hold onto those truths, my friends. For, if we can do so, we will be of the same mind. And won't you love to know that, in so doing, you will make the joy of Christ Jesus (and Paul) complete.