

May 29 , 2022

Seventh Sunday of Easter

Philippians 2:1-13

“Let The Same Mind Be In You That Was In Christ Jesus”

1. “I just want you kids to get along!” my mom would say when my brother and I were little.
 - a. I’m three years older than my brother and I guess we must have fought a lot.
 - b. In fact, there were times when we were little that she would say all she wanted for her birthday was for us to get along.
2. Paul wanted the church in Philippi to get along.
 - a. He is writing to them, a church he loved, and he is so proud of them.
 - b. But his letter does seem to indicate there were some issues among them.
 - c. It is not very clear what the issues were, but there is at least a sense that there was some sort of disagreement or difference of opinion regarding something important.
 - d. Paul writes: I just want you kids to get along.
 - e. But what would that mean? Don’t fight? Well, certainly.
 - f. But he takes this opportunity to set the bar much much higher than the issue at hand. Paul writes: *be united in your convictions and united in your love, with a common purpose and a common mind. That is the one thing that would make me completely happy. There must be no competition among you, no conceit, but everybody is to be humble: value others over yourselves, each of you thinking of the interests of others before your own.*
 - g. How to do that? He says be like Jesus. Let the same mind be in you as was in Christ Jesus:
 - h. Not power hungry, not choosing power over, not I-win-you-lose, not brute force, not conquering, not humiliating.
The object is not to win but to serve. And that includes risks that those who worship at the altar of violence will roll right over us. And yet we will rise.
3. Is this the passage we needed today as the country churns with grief at the news of two massacres in as many weeks:
 - a. Buffalo NY where an 18-year-old White Nationalist killed 10 African American grocery shoppers, and Uvalde TX where another 18-year-old murdered 19 elementary school children and two teachers?
 - b. Both shooters killed people with semi-automatic assault rifles, whose only legitimate place I would argue is in a war zone.
 - c. And let the calls for thoughts and prayers commence,
 - i. and the calls for arming school teachers
 - ii. and the rhetoric that the Second Amendment’s right to bear arms is somehow holier than the central statement in the Declaration of Independence which states that we are “endowed by [our] Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”
4. But this isn’t a lecture on constitutional law. It’s a sermon, a theological reflection.
 - a. So the theological statement which Paul makes actually does shed light on our quandary.
 - b. Let the same mind be in you as was in Christ Jesus.

- c. And before someone argues that this is apples and oranges, at least let's consider this:
 - i. when going head to head with the hypermilitarized Roman Empire, Jesus didn't rally his troops to get more weapons to make it a fair fight (remember he told Peter to put away his sword after Peter chopped off the ear of one in the posse who came to arrest Jesus).
 - ii. Jesus could have raised an army. But he didn't (which frustrated Judas into betraying him, because Judas was ready for an armed revolution).
- d. Our mind is far from the mind of Jesus if what we think is that more weapons means more safety, or higher walls means more safety, or bigger jails means more safety.
 - i. The mind of Jesus didn't revolve about overpowering the enemy, but about serving one another, even the enemy.
 - ii. When our politicians are tested on the subject, they either call for more weapons, walls and jails, or they throw their arms up as if to say they'd rather not poke the gun lobby and risk losing their seat.
- e. What's wrong with a law that says citizens can't own weapons which only belong in a battlefield like an AR15, which has been used in DOZENS of mass shootings including Buffalo and Uvalde?
 - i. We had one such national law for ten years, and we saw a decline in mass shootings.
 - ii. In the years since that last Assault Weapons ban and large capacity magazine ban ended in 2004, mass shootings with these high capacity semi-automatic rifles tripled. <https://www.politifact.com/factchecks/2022/may/25/joe-biden/joe-biden-said-mass-shootings-tripled-when-assault/>
 - iii. Since 2009, there have been more than 50 mass shootings involving an assault weapon with a high capacity magazine where almost 500 people have been killed and almost 800 have been wounded. <https://everytownresearch.org/maps/mass-shootings-in-america/>
 - iv. Just a couple of weeks ago, two children died because of contaminated formula, and the responsible company was made to recall their product. But 19 elementary school kids and their two teachers are shot point blank with a weapon of war and then what? <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/powdered-baby-formula-recall-similac-fda/> <https://abc7.com/ualde-texas-robb-elementary-school-active-shooter-district-lockdown/11892411/>
 - v. As the Psalmist wrote: *How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?* Psalm 13:1
 - f. After mass shootings in other countries around the world in recent years, their governments, often conservative governments, enacted laws banning the weapons used in the mass shootings. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/25/world/americas/2nd-amendment-gun-laws.html>
- 5. So what is there for the church to say?
 - a. The PCUSA has a decades long public stance for sensible regulation of gun ownership and background checks, and specifically recommended in 2008 to <<ban the sale and possession of large ammunition magazines and assault weapons that have no redeemable social purpose, and cannot legitimately be termed "sporting guns" >> <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/what-we-believe/gun-violence/>

- b. What do we do with the soul-draining realization which comes from these news of mass shootings in this country? *be united in your convictions and united in your love, with a common purpose and a common mind – the mind of Jesus.*
 - c. Gun violence is a Social Justice issue which calls us out to action.
 - d. And like the other Social Justice issues we tackle (systemic poverty and structural racism) there is a systemic element to the issue of gun violence and gun safety.
 - e. The solutions are community solutions, not scapegoating or demonizing one individual shooter, let's say.
 - f. Zoom out, and what do we see?
 - i. Pressures of systemic poverty as families try to make ends meet,
 - ii. insufficient mental health resources,
 - iii. bullying in schools,
 - iv. racism and xenophobia in society turned as chants to amass political power.
 - v. There are persistent fears being manipulated in some sectors of our society and given false solutions which escalate violence.
 - g. If we are *united in [our] convictions and united in [our] love, with a common purpose and a common mind – [let that be the] mind of Jesus*, who didn't choose violence, but resisted it, who didn't misuse his privilege or power, but used it to serve others, who confronted injustice by being among those who were being crushed by society.
 - h. Think and act systemically, thanking and conversing with members of our local board of education, our local teachers, our medical professionals so we keep a common mind as a community which stands for compassion and supports those who are vulnerable to explode into violence.
 - i. Think and act systemically, holding accountable our elected officials in Indianapolis and Washington so we can all live in communities of compassion, not as frightened citizens hiding in self-built fortresses against "those people" (whoever we can conveniently scapegoat instead of recognizing as members of our community).
 - j. And as a dear friend wrote recently: Vote as you pray. Live as you pray.
6. Paul told the Philippians: *be united in your convictions and united in your love, with a common purpose and a common mind... There must be no competition among you, no conceit, but everybody is to be humble: value others over yourselves, each of you thinking of the interests of others before your own.* Maybe this was the right passage for us today.

Sources:

Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, Philippians by Fred Craddock. Atlanta: John Knox Press. 1985.

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/the-christ-hymn/commentary-on-philippians-21-13-8>

Reflection Questions:

1. How are you coping with the news about the recent mass shooting in Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas?
2. Paul urges the Philippians to let the same mind / the same attitude be in them as was in Christ Jesus. What are specific qualities / elements shown by Jesus which Paul wanted the Philippians to emulate (read Philippians 2:1-13)?
3. What are some things we need to shift to genuinely approach having the same attitude that Jesus had? Bonus points if you suggest ways to get there...