

19<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – Year A  
Lutheran, Radcliff, KY  
Philippians 2:1-11  
Pastor Paul Horn

September 21, 2008

Faith

### **Your Attitude will be the same as that of Christ Jesus**

*If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, <sup>2</sup> then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. <sup>3</sup> Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: <sup>6</sup> Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. <sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! <sup>9</sup> Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Leonard Bernstein, the late conductor of the New York Philharmonic orchestra, was once asked to name the most difficult instrument to play. Without hesitation, he replied, “The second fiddle. I can get plenty of first violinists, but to find someone who can play the second fiddle with enthusiasm—that’s a problem. And if we have no second fiddle, we have no harmony.” There’s no glory in the second violin position. A first violinist typically gets the solo. The audience hears the melody from the first violinists. There’s no glory in playing as an offensive lineman on the football team. He blocks and pushes with all his strength all game just to create a hole for the running back to zip through, cross the goal line and receive all the praise from the fans and announcers. That’s the way it is in life. No one wants to play second fiddle. Everybody wants recognition, but not many understand the life of a Christian (maybe we don’t always either): Christ has called us to serve others with humility and love.

The apostle Paul in his letter to the Christians living in Philippi teaches us a lesson on humility. In vs2 the apostle says, “**Make my joy complete.**” You will make my day as an apostle if you continue to have these Christian attitudes, “**Be like minded,**” live in harmony with each other, have an attitude that you are willing to work with each other. Many of us have a German heritage, which means instead of being like minded we’re hard headed. I think that it’s more than our background that makes us that way. The sinful nature in each of us doesn’t want to live in harmony with one another.

Paul continues, “**Make my joy complete by having the same love,**” The Greek word that Paul uses for love is *agape*: a selfless, a love that seeks nothing in return when love is given. This is the word the epistle writers use to describe God’s love for each of us; unconditional love. The verb tense he uses in the Greek is translated, “**Continue to**

**exercise this kind of love,”** not just on Sunday morning, but everyday, with everyone, regardless of how they treat you. We don't always love that way, do we?

**“Make my joy complete, by being one in spirit and purpose.”** What one purpose do we as a body of believers have? It's found in our mission statement, “Strengthen one another, seek the unchurched and strive for spiritual growth.” That's not always our purpose in life, is it? I want to carry out my own agenda. I have my own mission for my life.

**“Make my joy complete by doing nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit.”** The Greek word for *selfish ambition* means *rivalry*, in the sense of an individual doing anything to make themselves look bigger and to make people think they are better. We never do that, do we, try to make people think we're better because of the things we do?

**“In humility consider others better than yourselves.”** Not that everyone else is superior or more talented than you are, but Christian love sees others as worthy of preferential treatment. Regard others as worthy of more honor than you. Too often we want think, “But I'm more educated, I make better decisions than so-and-so, I serve more than they do, I'm humble!” We think that we are the ones who are more valuable to the team or the office or to the family or to this congregation.

**“Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”** It is healthy to have hobbies and recreation activities that you enjoy. These are blessings from your Heavenly Father. But should we keep our eyes gazing at only what we want and not looking after the interests of others? For example, you may think it is in the best interest of your family to sleep in on Sunday morning or to hurry up and rush the kids to bed and skip devotion time. But is that in the best interest for your family? When we look at the drawings and plans for our future building, are we more concerned about what we like best or about what could be changed to best serve the needs of the unchurched?

When we take an honest look at our attitudes and the way we act, it appears as though this is the letter we've read this morning, *“If you have any encouragement from being united with the world, if any gratification from its lust, if any intimacy with its character, if any loathing and indifference, then make my joy complete by being closed-minded, having disparate loves of self, being divided in spirit and purpose. Do all things out of selfish ambition and in vain conceit, and in arrogance consider others lesser than yourself. Each of you should look only to your own interests, and dismiss the interests of others.”* That's the problem, isn't it? Too often we reply to the letter that Satan wrote rather than the letter the Holy Spirit wrote to us through the apostle Paul.

How does God feel about these attitudes? From the first lesson this morning he said, **“I will judge you, each one according to his ways, declares the Sovereign LORD** (Ezekiel 18). It doesn't sound as if we've made God's joy complete. What's the solution? The LORD continues, **“Repent! Turn away from all your offenses!”** That's the theme for today's service, isn't it: “Repent and Turn from Evil Ways.” Each and every one of us must admit to our Father, “I have sinned.” We must acknowledge our

sins, turn away from those things we have done to offend our God and in humble faith turn to Christ... **who, being in very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross!"** (vs6-8)

It's hard for us to imagine that Steve Jobs, CEO of Apple (which has sold over 110 million iPods) and who is co-founder of Pixar Animation Studios would give up his position and salary and go to work as a computer programmer. Nor would President Bush step down as commander-in-chief of the most powerful nation on earth to take the position and salary of the mayor of Radcliff. Yet Jesus had more wealth, more power, more authority than these two men, more than all the rulers of the world combined. In fact, Jesus is one who gives all governments power and authority. And yet the King of kings laid aside his royal crown and regal robes and donned the clothes of a servant. God became flesh, as Paul says, "**He made himself nothing,**" literally, *he emptied himself*. When God became incarnate he didn't pour out substance, he didn't give up his divinity. Jesus Christ was still 100% God and 100% man combined in the one person. But he voluntarily gave up the ability to use some of his divine powers. Why would the God who caused mountains to spring up out of the earth and the depths of the oceans be carved out by the breath of his mouth choose to give up some of those powers? Why would the God who demands death for all sinners come and live among them as one of them and then die for them in their place? Because of his attitude....humility, agape love.... He thought it was in your best interest that he come down to earth, take on human flesh and live the demands our God makes of us, to live in harmony with his fellow man, to love unconditionally, to consider others better than himself. Jesus did all those things perfectly, because it's obvious that you and I cannot. Jesus thought it was in your best interest that he be hung on a tree and called cursed, so that you and I would not. Jesus thought it was in your best interest that he allow God's punishment and wrath come on him rather than you. Jesus thought it was in your best interest to become obedient to death, rather than you die for your sins. Jesus thought it was in your best interest that he choose to give all of this to you freely as a gift through his promise that accompanies the sprinkling of water.

Through baptism, the Apostle Paul says, you were buried with Christ into death, and have been raised with him to live a new life (Rom 6:4). Maybe you were baptized a long time ago as a baby, or maybe not so long ago. Your baptism still has meaning for you today. Tonight when you lay your head on your pillow and pray, "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray thee Lord my soul to keep," and you reflect back on the day, and think about everything you have done to offend your God, remember your baptism, when the Holy Spirit washed all those sins away, and then you can close your eyes and rest in peace...at peace with yourself and at peace with God. And when you open your eyes in the morning, you thank God for blessing you with another day of grace on his green earth, and when you splash water on your face, let that water remind you of your baptism, in which your sinful nature was drowned. Then drown that sinful nature again, with it's sinful attitudes, and let your new creation arise to serve the Lord in humility and love.

This is the new life you will live: your attitude will be the same as that of Christ Jesus (vs5). In humility you will consider others better than yourself. You will say, "It's not all about me and what I want. My life is about Christ and that he came to serve me. How can I serve him? What can I do?" Ask your pastor, a church council member or a committee chairman, "How can I get involved at church?" And when you serve, remember, it's not all about me and how much I do for the Lord. It's about how Christ lives in me and enables me to serve. It's not about what others aren't doing. Instead of saying "I wish they'd help out around here a little more," say, "How can I equip them to serve? How can I encourage that individual to serve here at Faith Lutheran?" That's being like minded. That's having humility that considers others better than yourself.

How can I put Christ's humility into practice? The building committee has taken your ideas from the survey you filled out and putting them into practice. The architects, who are with us this morning, are putting your ideas into drawings. Our liturgical consultant, who is also with us this morning, is educating us on how we can design our building as deliberately Lutheran as we can. I know there are things I would love to have in the new church. There are specific things you want in the new church. Exercising Christian humility sets aside what we want as individuals and directs everything toward Christ. In humility we ask, "How would God have us build this church?" I think that he would have us focus everything on Christ and how he comes to us through his Word and the Sacraments. In humility considering others better than ourselves, we look at our new building and ask, "How can we best carry out our mission, with one purpose, with one spirit?" How can we look not only to our interests, but also to the interests of others in this new building? By asking ourselves, "How can we enhance the experience of the guest, as he or she walks from the parking lot to the pew?" We may have to design things and build this building in ways we may not feel comfortable with, but if serves the needs of others better, then we are exercising *agape* love and Christian humility.

How can serve each other in Christian humility? When someone comes to church who hasn't been here in a while, instead of saying, "It's about time you showed up!" Say, "I'm really glad you're here. I missed you." Your attitude will be the same as that of Christ Jesus, who humbled himself for your salvation.

There may be no glory in playing second fiddle in the orchestra or playing offensive line on the football team. The world will not stand up and applaud you when you serve others out of Christ-like humility, but Christ will, and he'll say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant!" To which we humbly respond, "I have only done my duty." I pray that Christ's attitude of humility and service that led him to suffer and die for you motivate you to follow his example of Christian humbleness this week. Amen.