**Philippians 2:1-8** October 11, 2020

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Pentecost 19

*Philippians 2:1If 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, 2then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. 3Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

*5Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! 9Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**WWJT**

Unfair expectations. That is what gets you on the side of Cinderella in her movie. I can remember it as a child. We watched the unfairness of kind, good-hearted Cinderella being victimized by her step-sisters and step-mother. They made Cinderella to be their maid, cook and everything else, while they did nothing but dress-up, socialize and eat their favorite food. And then, when Cinderella finally had one ray of hope in the invitation to the royal ball for *all* young women of the kingdom, her evil stepmother found a way to defy the king’s orders. Oooh, it just made me steam! So unfair!

How do you deal with unfair expectations? Do you get angry? Do you give up? The real issue is in the long term. Long term unfairness twists and poisons many. Sure, once in a while you hear about people who rise above the unfairness in their lives, but a lot of people, I would guess most people, really struggle with it.

How do you deal with unfair expectations people have because you are a Christian? “You Christians talk a good game, but…” Or “I thought you were a Christian…” I can remember a man staying at a nearby hotel who wanted “assistance.” I brought him a couple bags of food that he could prepare in the microwave. No, he wanted money for the room, not food. And in the busy hotel lobby he proceeded to shout what hypocrites Christians are who have money for a nice church building, but not for the poor. I walked away. You can walk away from unfair expectations, but it isn’t that easy, is it? Those conversations replay themselves in your mind through the day. They haunt you through the sleepless hours of the night. That was so unfair. What should I have done? What could I have said?

How do you react? Do you give up? Do you give in? Do you get angry? Do you get poisoned? Do you withdraw?

There is a four-letter abbreviation that a pastor in Topeka, Kansas and a youth minister in Holland, Michigan came up with to help us in times we find ourselves in a quandary, wondering what we should do, how we should react. It is that well-known abbreviation WWJD. While this is not the be all and end all of the Christian faith, it can be very helpful. When standing there being berated for being a hypocritical Christian, or just in general wondering how a Christian should react, it can be helpful to ask ourselves, “What Would Jesus Do?” When we know that what we want to do isn’t the right thing, we tap into our knowledge of Jesus from the Gospels, we ask ourselves, what would Jesus do? WWJD?

Here in this reading from Philippians, God’s word takes us a step farther. It says,

**WWJT**

What does the “T” stand for? Allow me to read a few lines from our reading to see if you can figure it out. ***“Make my joy complete by being like-minded… consider others better… Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus…”*** Like-minded, consider, attitude—WWJT—What Would Jesus… Think! In the second chapter of the book of Philippians, God’s word directs us past deeds, to the source of deeds, thoughts.

This small, four-chapter book of the Bible is sometimes called Paul’s Letter of Joy. That’s because these Philippians brought great joy to Paul. It was not that they were his favorites. Like a good parent, Paul didn’t have favorites. But they brought him joy because they “got it” more than other congregations. Unlike other congregations, Paul didn’t have to write to the Philippians and tell them that, really, it is beyond inappropriate to get drunk in church—really (the Corinthians). He didn’t have to tell them to stop adding rule after rule to the Gospel message, “Believe on the Lord Jesus and be saved” (the Galatians). He didn’t have to tell them, that regardless of what some people at church were saying, they would be raised in Christ Jesus to eternal life (the Thessalonians). Paul didn’t have to say any of that to the Philippians. They heard the Gospel, they believed the Gospel, they lived like they believed it. Not that they were without sin, but they got it.

When people “get it,” something happens. You can go beyond the basics. To these people who got it, these Philippians, Paul says, “You know, the Christian life is not just about right doing, it is about right thinking.”

We understand that. Attitude matters. If you are a football fan and you have the league’s greatest quarterback, you are glad to have him on your team. But if he is the sort of guy who is trouble off-the-field, and gets frequent unsportsmanlike penalties on the field, you aren’t so sad to see him traded, even though he got you wins. But a player with a great attitude, a team lifter, who even gives the defensive end who just sacked him for a ten yard loss, he gives the opponent a hand to get up – hey, a player like that, you love him not just for what he does, but how he thinks.

To an infinitely greater degree, Paul not only praised Christ for the work he did, but he puts Christ Jesus’ attitude on full display and says that it is a light for our way. ***“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing.”***

This is something we perhaps do not put enough attention on. Yes, we know what great things he has done for us. But do you realize—do you realize—what kind of thinking is behind those actions? Before being incarnate as a helpless little baby in a smelly stable in a backwater town, he had the full exercise of deity. It wasn’t like he was something wimpy like the emperor of Rome or president of the United States. He had the universe in his hand. But he put aside the exercise of his deity (while not stopping being God) for the good and salvation of others. He gained nothing for himself. His mind was only on service to others.

Look at the life of Jesus in the Gospels. Watch him defend the powerless, heal the sick, encourage the troubled, mourn over Jerusalem, protect his disciples, endure the scorn. All the while he is marching to the cross. You see the special attitude in him, and the name of that attitude is humility. If there were not this humble, other-serving attitude, how in the world could the Son of God ***“make himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant… humble himself and become obedient to death—even death on a cross!”***

Every moment of Jesus’ life was a humbling of himself for others who didn’t deserve it. Every morning he woke up with the conscious determination to march to the cross to make the sacrifice for us sinners. And here is the amazing part: He didn’t regret one bit of it. He didn’t think, “I’m doing this, for these guys?!” All of it was willing service.

***“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.”***

There is another reason, besides Jesus’ humble service, that we can lift our thinking above an earthly level. Listen to the first verse of the reading: ***“If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ…”*** You do have encouragement from being united with Christ, right? You realize that life is not a meaningless drifting through the seas of life. In Christ we march toward eternity. We have encouragement when our loved ones are near death. We realize that God is in control, has a plan, and works *all* things for the good of those who love him. Yes, we have encouragement in Christ and ***“comfort from his love.”***

***“If [you have] any fellowship with the Spirit, “*** We have fellowship within this body of believers. You can go to fellow Christians today with your troubles, ask their prayers, their help, and know that they will. And if you doubt it, it is probably because you haven’t even tried. Think of the fellowship and friendship you have here with those around you. Even if you have a difference of opinion, you know that something deeper binds you together.

You also know that the hard and heartless ways of the world are not found here but rather ***“tenderness and compassion.”*** Profit and efficiency at all costs—if you want that go work for Amazon… Turning your back on friends because of a social media post—if you want that do some browsing on your phone or PC… Sniping and cliques—you know that these things have no purchase in this place. And if they do, they need to be ended now. ***“If [you have] any tenderness and compassion.”***

Looked at what Christ has done for us. Look at the blessings we now enjoy through him. How can we not think differently from the world around us?

Which gives us a totally different attitude in the face of the world’s expectations of Christians. We realize that we *should* be held to a higher standard than people around us. After all, what do they have? They don’t have heaven. They don’t have a Savior who loved them (well, actually they do, but they don’t know it or have rejected him). They haven’t watched Jesus go to the cross. They don’t have the Spirit-given fellowship of believers. They haven’t learned about the tenderness and compassion that Christ’s people have, which extends beyond political parties, social causes and income brackets. We find joy in striving for a higher standard than the world, because of all that God has given us!

The crucial aspect of this thinking—something that the world cannot mimic—is brought out again and again in our reading. ***“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.” “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus… who made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant… he humbled himself and became obedient to death…”***

The critical element of Christ-like thinking, the critical attitude that the world cannot mirror, and in fact will usually mock, is humility. As it is advocated more plainly here than anywhere else in the hundreds of pages of this Bible, ***“[to] consider others better than yourselves.”***

God give us this mind of Christ.

We let the insults pass. We don’t try to get even. We bless those who hate us, pray for those who persecute us, turn the other cheek, walk the extra mile. And yet we also know that there come times to confront. There were times when Jesus refused to do miracles for people because he knew it would be spiritually harmful rather than spiritually beneficial. There were times when Jesus used his divine wisdom to expose godless motives and arguments. But even then, it was always, always, always, for their good, not his.

It’s going to happen to you. You are going to be challenged. You are going to hear something, see something, have something done to you. You are going to know that it is a test of your religion. Pause and remember the question “WWJT,” and the direction of this word of God, ***“You attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus… In humility consider others better than yourselves.”*** Amen.