

Palm Sunday April 17, 2011 “Whose mind?”

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5)

“Are you out of your mind?” It was a common exclamation that my mother used with me when I was younger. I was always pushing the boundaries, wandering into things that I was not supposed to. That was her expression that characterized my actions. To her, I was out of the mind that she thought I should have and the one that she was seeking to plant in me. “What *were* you thinking?” would express the same thing. “How can you imagine that action is the right path for you to take?” Perhaps you have your own version of that expression. It describes a sense that there is a “right” mind, and we don’t have it but somebody else does.

Jesus was accused of the same thing by his family in a couple of instances – at the temple when he was a young boy and then later as he began his radical teaching and healing in ways that alienated him from the traditions of the time. He was walking a new path, a new understanding of what it meant to live centered in Divine Life and his “mind”, his way of thinking was so radical that many could not grasp it. We still struggle with his understanding because it so goes against our culture of self-interest, self-confidence, self-promotion. Jesus’ path was countercultural then and it is countercultural now.

Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan in their book *“The Last Week”* describe the powerful forces that come to clash in those fateful events in Jerusalem during Jesus’ last week of human life. Jerusalem had, by that time, been the “center of the sacred geography” of the Jewish people of over a millennium. It was about to undergo a major earthquake – a new creation – a new, what Christians would later call – covenant, understanding, way of being with the Living God.

The authors suggest that on that day when Jesus entered Jerusalem there were two processions. One was a peasant procession led by Jesus from the Mount of Olives through the east gate of the city. These were people who had followed Jesus and because of his new teachings about the love of God embracing all had a new sense of hope for their own lives.

On the opposite side of the city through the west gate came Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, Idumea, and Samaria. It was common practice for the Roman officials to be in the city for the major Jewish festivals when Jews from all over would be thronging into the city. They were there to keep order and to, no doubt, collect taxes, and remind the people of who held the true power and authority.

So we can imagine these two processions coming from two different “minds” of what life is all about. They are destined to collide, even as they continue to collide today. Even Jesus’ disciples would question, betray and eventually abandon him. The path he walked was not only hard to grasp in one’s mind. It was hard to live. Jesus had to show us how restoration of being is actually accomplished. It happens in a way that we could never have imagined in our own minds. It is the path of outpouring of self in love. This path won’t make you any money in the stock market, or help you achieve great status, or help you win friends and influence many people. It will only lead you into a life that is abundant with love and eternal.

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus”.

How do we allow another person's understanding and life to enter into our own thinking? How do we begin to see the world with the mind of Christ? How are we actually transformed into his Body, his hands and feet in our own lifetimes?

I think the clue is in the first word: Let. It's something that we have to surrender to – just as Jesus had to surrender to the path of sacrificial love. It's not a passive thing but rather an allowing of the atmosphere and way of being that runs through these great events to seep into our own souls.

It's like undertaking the study of swimming. You can read all about the technique, the muscles needed, the best swimwear, the stages of learning. At some point you have to get into the water and allow it to surround you. And, then – only then can you lift your feet, lay back and allow it to carry you. Once you learn to float in the water, then you are ready to actively engage with it, move through it, use it to carry you.

Only when we truly enter into the water of Jesus' own life, ponder it, let it seep into our souls, can we then begin to let his mind be in us.

This second chapter of the letter to Philippians was most assuredly written by Paul from a prison cell where he urges the fractious community at Philippi to let Christ's way of thinking and acting serve as a template for their own lives.

Let me read a modern version of this text – from Eugene Petersen's "*The Message*", beginning with the fifth verse of the 2nd chapter. . . .

Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death - - and the worst kind of death at that: a crucifixion.

If we only had this passage to guide us we would have enough.

The mind of Christ was to "empty himself", pour himself out, not grasp at what he might have wanted, but to allow the life of the Father to be manifest through his surrender in love.

Was he "out of his mind"? Yes indeed. He was in the mind of God. This week which we call "Holy" is infused with the mind of Christ. Get your toes wet in the water of this path. Soak it in. Have a different pace this week. Take the time to reflect, to think about your life and Jesus' life and how they might be coming together.

"Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus".

Amen.