

**A Little Jesus Goes a Long Way**  
**Philippians 2:1-11**  
**September 28, 2008**

*If then, there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, 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. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.*

*Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee would bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.*

Author and lecturer, Phyllis Tickle, who was the founding editor of the religion department of *Publishers Weekly*, has said that every 500 years or so the Christian church has a big rummage sale...metaphorically speaking...puts its theology, its worship, music and liturgy and sermon styles, its mission methodology out on the lawn so to speak and sorts through it. Deciding once again what is essential, what needs to be kept and what can be let go, what can be shed. Isn't that a great image? And she believes we are in one of those cleaning phases right now.

I've been cleaning out my basement this weekend...closets, the laundry room, the office which has become the junk room...I have bags of trash to put out on trash day...bags and boxes

of things to go to Arc and Goodwill. Letting go of all that stuff I don't need any more is a great feeling! Deciding what is essential...only keeping what I will really need and will use. Finding things I thought I had lost and rejoicing in reclaiming their use.

All this physical sorting out mirrors an internal process that has also consumed me lately. An mid-life sorting out of who I am now that I am totally on my own...single and with my two sons establishing their own lives in Seattle, WA. The internal process is even more intense than the basement cleaning! Letting go of old habits and attitudes, of old ideas and emotions, of guilt and grief and grudges is an exhausting and an exhilarating process. I have found that when you ask God to help you shed old stuff and open your heart to the new and improved that God takes you seriously! Every day it seems God holds up a mirror in front of me and says...how about this idea, attitude, way of living, how's it working for you, ready to let go of this?

So it is that I come to stand before you this morning with a new message from my heart...well, its not really new...it's one of those things I had lost in the jumble of my life, in the basement of my heart, and that I have found again through my internal sorting and shedding. Reclaiming it is like having something brand new. What's on my heart today is what I believe to be at the heart of the church... the experience of Jesus as the Christ.

There is a saying that goes around this church community. It is, "A little Jesus goes along way. "A little Jesus goes along way around here," we like to say to one another. We believe in God and we think Jesus was a good guy and all that and a great teacher...but let's not talk about him too much...we don't want to be like those who are always talking about Jesus, expressing their faith in a vocabulary we are uncomfortable with, saying things we may not agree with, things we are not sure we believe, things that sound politically *un*-correct to us. And you see we're not sure about the Christ part of his name, just what that really means. So just give us

a little Jesus, preferably at some of his nicer moments, every now and then because a little Jesus goes a long way.”

I am here to tell you this morning, my friends, that I have rediscovered that a little Jesus does go a long way....though perhaps not in the way that we may have all been thinking.

Paul wrote to the church that he had founded at Philippi because it was a community in need of some sorting out, some shedding. This was a faithful church that Paul dearly loved. It was a Body of Christ at work in its world in many good ways. It was also in need of a gentle reminder of what was at its core, what was essential. This community of believers was distracting itself from its witness through individualism and the neglect of its life as a connected body, as the Body of Christ. So Paul wrote them a reminder. *If then, there is any encouragement in Christ, any love, joy, sharing, compassion, be of the same mind as Christ. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.*

The word translated from Paul’s Greek as *mind* is actually a verb, not a noun. Paul is not saying have the same intellect as Christ. He is saying have the same heart as Christ Jesus. Live from your heart as Jesus lived with us, essentially live in the same understanding about living even to the point of death as Jesus the Christ. You see, Paul was an educated Greek citizen but first and foremost he was a Jew. For the Hebrews, the mind as the intellect was not the center of a person. The center of a human being was the heart. The heart was the physical center in the body, the seat of emotions, the seat of moral action and the seat of the intellect. Let the same *mind* be in you as was in Christ Jesus could be paraphrased let the same *heart* be in you as was in Christ Jesus. Paul was saying, “Church, to be the witness you are called to be in this world, make my joy complete and live together in the same understanding as Christ, in the same *heart* as Christ lived.”

And what is that heart? Paul quotes a familiar, perhaps favorite hymn, to the Philippians to remind them what the mind, the heart of Christ is in its essence. *Let the same [heart] be in you that was in Christ Jesus who in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself,...* And being found in human form, humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross. The mind of Christ is found in the humble heart, the totally open heart, the heart willing to allow itself to be cleaned out and to shed whatever needs to be shed, to keep only what is necessary to be in relationship with God, to be one with God.

The essential event of our Christian faith, my friends, is a humble act of service coming from an open, vulnerable, willing heart. Jesus was willing to humbly empty his heart of all that he did not need so he could be in relationship to God and of service to God. He found himself in God. By letting go of all but his essential” God Self,” that self made in God’s image. He was so centered in that self made in God’s image that he could be truly self-forgetting...not self-denying.

When we are merely self-denying we are still painfully aware of our selves. Jesus allowed himself to live so fully and joyfully into being a child of God that he could willingly surrender even personal ambitions, even to the point of death. And not just any death...To the point of a terrifying, excruciatingly painful, shameful death of a convicted criminal. And with no thought to the end result except to be more of the self God created him to be.

Here’s the paradox, the mystery...it only made his essential self, that God-image self more real...*exalted* as the hymn says. It is this mysterious paradox that we affirm and celebrate in our UCC Statement of Faith when we say, “In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified

and risen Savior, you [O God], have come to us and shared our common lot, conquering sin and death and reconciling the world to yourself.”

*Let the same mind, this same heart be in you that was in Christ Jesus.* My friends, Jesus the Christ is our example, our model of what it means to live fully human, fully in the self created by God in God’s image and in relationship to God. Cleaning out the basements of our hearts, emptying our selves, is the only path to a fuller relationship with God, a fuller discovery of who we are as children of God, made in God’s image, a fuller connection with one another ...letting go all the old habits and attitudes, ideas, emotions, grief, guilt and grudges that create the barriers between ourselves and God. And when we ask...the Spirit of God shows up to help! This is not a pie-in-the-sky, sentimental journey to self-discovery...just like cleaning out the basement of my home...its hard work...dirty work...there can be some nasty stuff hidden away down there that is painfully hard to scrape off the floor.

It is also joyous work! I know...I’m in the midst of it myself. The rewards are lightness, joy, more peace, more love! I have found that, as you heard the choir sing, when I truly do the shedding work, I am “raised up to God’s shoulders....I walk on stormy seas.”

Because....a little Jesus goes a long way...

Let the same heart be in you that was in Christ Jesus...the Heart of God. Thanks be to God. Amen.