**United With Christ May 2, 2021**

**Philippians 2:1-11**

1 If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, 2 make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. 5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, 7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, 8 he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (NRS).

Today’s Scripture is a personal letter written from the Apostle Paul to the church in Philippi. Paul founded the church on his 2nd missionary journey. Now Paul is in prison somewhere and the Philippian church has sent gifts for his care and are praying for his release. Paul’s letter to them is a letter of joy and reassurance which seems quite unusual for someone in prison. Paul’s perspective is that despite all of his hardship he has found great satisfaction. So, he is not focused on his burdens but the joy and satisfaction that he has from something that is much more important than any hardships that he faces. He is actually happy in prison because the most important thing is being achieved and that is that the gospel is advancing. The efforts to stop Paul did not stop the advancement of the gospel. Paul is in prison for the same reason they killed Jesus – to protect the status quo and stop the spread and influence of Jesus. But no matter what they do, they cannot stop the gospel.

Paul’s theology is that we are to copy Christ. The focus of his letter is Christ and our response to him which is a matter of surrendering your life from a life of this world to a life modeled after Christ. How we are to respond to Christ is unity and humility as illustrated by the life of Christ. We are to copy the example of Jesus. It is all about your orientation of your life. Christians are to focus their lives on Christ. The Apostle Paul means 100%. When we focus on Christ, we do not focus on our own problems, worries, or whatever may be bother us at the time. There is no conflict at all in the life of the church because we are all of one mind. That is because we are all of the same mind as Christ. So, you are to mirror your life after the teachings of Jesus. Focus on what Jesus said and did. Model your life after the attitude of Jesus. Paul’s theology is that we are saved by grace but he is adamant that Christianity means much more than this. It is a call for action to reorient your life. You must be like Christ. Adopt his attitude and behavior, treat people like he treats people, and love others like he loves others.

The contemporary lesson for us is about the orientation of your life. We are to focus our lives on Christ. I preach this concept many times because it is taught in the Bible in many different places. It is another slice of same pie along with the concept of being born again and being dead to sin to live a new life. Focusing your life on Christ means not following the ways of the world and separating yourself from desires that society reinforces. The contemporary lesson for us is also about unity. There is a powerful contemporary lesson in the call for unity. The call for unity is not just so that we can all get along. The call for unity is for us to be like Christ. We are all united together when we are like Christ with love, compassion, sacrifice, and service. When we are one with Christ then we all get along together in unity because we are of one mind, one heart, and one spirit.

The Apostle Paul’s doctrine is theology that is centered on Jesus - what Jesus said and what Jesus did. It is never about the other guy or what someone did or said. It is all about you and your relationship with the Lord. When you are in the right relationship with the Lord, you are in the right relationship with others. It is all about you living your life in accord with Christ. It is when we model our lives after Christ that we are one with Jesus and then we are all in harmony with one another. The American Reformation Movement was all about unity. It is individual preferences that separate us. We will never agree on doctrine and creeds or what others should and should not believe. What can and should unite us is something we all can agree upon and that is modeling our lives after what Jesus said and what Jesus did.

The Holy Communion is a perfect example unity set up for us by Jesus Christ himself. It is an invitation to all and we are all welcome. We are all invited. The table is a place where family and friends gather. The offering is Jesus offering of himself. So, we share together his body and his blood and then we have Christ in us. Communion is oneness with Christ.

It is not that we are all supposed to get along and have no division among us and sacrifice principals so that we appease someone who is upset. It is that we are united together and we all get along in harmony because we surrender our lives to Christ. We are like Christ. Everyone is to be the person that Jesus teaches us to be. Everyone is to learn the lessons of the teacher. Everyone is to follow his in his footsteps. It is when we are centered focus on Jesus that we are all in unity and are all in accord with one another.