

## ***“Putting on the mind of Christ”***

**February 6, 2011**

*Text: 1 Corinthians 2:1-16, Philippians 2:1-5*

### I.

There’s football game later today that millions of people from around the world will be watching. Over the years, the Super Bowl has become more than a game; it is an event. In all candor, what it really is, is *America as spectacle*.

In the actual game, there will be a host of large, mighty men, each with a specific function. Each of them has a very specialized area of responsibility. And in a very real sense, the team that has the most players successfully carrying out their responsibility—or, the *right* players doing this at the *right* time—will win. Winning football teams are well-organized, well-oiled machines. Every body has their place and their function.

These characteristics were also true of the Roman Empire, the world in which the Apostle Paul helped begin the first Christian churches. The world of Rome was about power and control. It was multi-tiered, hierarchical and everyone had their own sphere of responsibility.

In the Christian Church, however, it wasn’t supposed to be like that. In the Church, there was supposed to be *equality* and *freedom* and *fluidity of movement*. That’s why Paul was deeply disturbed when he learned there were factions developing in the Corinthian Church.

There were internal power struggles going on. Apparently, there were **Paul’s** group and **Apollos’** group, **Cephas’** group and **Christ’s** group. In other words, there were divisions emerging in the church.

In a sense, this isn’t surprising ... because I can’t imagine there ever being a church where there wasn’t some trace of struggle for power and control. That’s *the human situation*. Still, to the best of its ability, the Church is supposed to rise above these sorts of struggles. We’re supposed to present ourselves to God, on our knees—symbolically, at least—in gratitude and humility and *put on the mind of Christ*.

### II.

There are reasons for this.

To begin with, this is what Paul did. In our reading from **1 Corinthians 2**, Paul notes — straight away—how he came to the Corinthians *in weakness and in fear and much trembling*.

If you know much about Paul, you know that it's not easy to imagine him in such a state. From all we know of him, Paul was a man of assertive, even aggressive impulses. He was tough, discerning and intellectually brilliant. And as we know, he suffered much in his mission as the Apostle to the Gentiles.

But Paul had a powerful experience of the risen Christ (whatever that means), and a strong sense, also, of *Christ crucified*.

The notion of *Christ crucified* points to the power of suffering love, the love of the one who suffered and died on the cross. As his followers, we are supposed to rise to some level of this same love. That's what Paul means, in our reading this morning, when he concludes, saying: *But we have the mind of Christ*.

The implication is that when we *have the mind of Christ*, there are no power struggles, because we've risen above that. The *mind of Christ* that lives in our mind has nudged us to a higher place.

1. There are no factions and divisions ... because we've risen above them.
2. There is no pettiness, no revengeful acts, no silly jealousies or power struggles because we've risen above them.

In other words, we no longer think or function on that level.

### III.

In the Church and in our personal life, when we *put on the mind of Christ*, we accept God's call to higher spiritual ground.

The goal of living towards *higher spiritual ground* is an important goal because that's how we *go deeper* as individuals and as people of faith. And to a considerable extent, that's the goal of the Church—to help nurture and guide people to places in their life where they can *go deeper*.

You see, friends, any church is a glimpse of *the human situation*. To some extent, it's a cross section. Churches are full of human beings, like us.

- And in Paul's day and with us today, we've all got our stuff.
- We all have our strong points, our gifts and the beauty that's in our spirit.
- But, to some extent, also, we're all *wounded*. We all have some wounds; if we didn't, we wouldn't be human.

You might think that you're not *wounded*, but think back about all the events of your life. In any of our lives, there's stuff that has happened and there's stuff that's ongoing.

In thinking back on my own life, for years, I never thought I had any wounds to speak of. But then I remembered my father's near fatal accident when I was five. We were living on the farm and my dad fell from high up in a barn. I remember how he had a double basilar skull fracture, a broken back, ten broken ribs and was unconscious for ten days. He was taken off some fifty miles to Mercy Hospital in Chicago, and, of course, my mother had to be with him.

And I remember how we were all—my two brothers and I (my sister, an infant of some eight or nine months, was with my mother)—parceled out ... to grandparents and to an aunt who was like a grandmother.

This was for a period of weeks; by the grace of God, my father survived. But part of the reaction of my older brother and me to this was to be very protective of my mother and our parents in general over the years—even, in a sense our whole family. I don't think we even realized it. Maintaining our family as a unit was a primary value for us.

To this day, since 1975, we have a week-long family reunion every other summer at Green Lake, Wisconsin.

#### IV.

The point is, we all have our wounds, some of which we may not even understand or be able to bring to speech.

There are untimely deaths; there are painful separations and divorce in marriage; there are life-threatening accidents and illness. There's financial disaster—loss of job, loss of investments, loss of property through foreclosure.

Also, some of us are the children of divorced parents, others of an alcoholic parent. We're *wounded*. Some of us, too, have been *wounded* by our own moral lapses and by periods of poor decision-making. The point—again—is that we all have our own stuff.

***Putting on the mind of Christ*** can lift us out of our wounded state and bring us healing, health and renewal. It can help us go deeper as a human being.

*Going deeper* is a process of self-discovery and transformation. It's what the Christian life is all about. It makes us bigger, better people. One of the primary goals of us as a church is to provide situations (small groups, for example) where people, through bible study, prayer and personal sharing, can *go deeper* and get in touch with more of the innate beauty that percolates within each of us.

#### V.

**Putting on the mind of Christ** helps us deal with any situation we might be in. It calms

us and reassures us: in our relationships, in our personal losses (loved ones/ job); in whatever personal accident or illness we've had to work through.

When we're wounded ... and vulnerable, much of the time, in these situations, it's hard to sort things out. If we're not careful, we're capable of making hasty decisions, decisions that we later regret.

All the time, people over-react to one situation or another. Sometimes, we get caught off guard and without having time to think things through and to anticipate possible consequences where we do or say something we wish we could take back.

## VI.

**Putting on the mind of Christ** can be enormously helpful to us in working through these life situations. Think about it: when we **put on the mind of Christ**, our spirit is lifted to higher spiritual ground where ...

1. Rather than be hasty and over-reactive, we're calm and filled with an inner peace.
2. Rather than act with vengeance or anger in our spirit, we slow it down and seek to be merciful and forgiving, allowing ourselves the chance to sort things out.
3. When we **put on the mind of Christ**, the Spirit gives us strength and courage to become a more Christ-like person.

In closing, may these words of Paul to the Philippians inspire us and guide us:

*If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing of the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete,* says Paul.

*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 ... look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.*

*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.* Friends, that's God's calling to us everyday; that's the life to which God calls us as Christians.

**All praise be unto God! Amen!**

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