



**"Of One Mind?"**

**Scripture – Philippians 2:1-11**

**Sermon preached by Gregory Knox Jones**

**Sunday, October 1, 2023**

Kimberly Long remembers a poignant moment when she and her husband lived in Atlanta. They worshiped at a church that did something unique on communion Sundays. They had bread machines running in the sanctuary. The aroma of bread wafted through their sacred space on the days they celebrated the Lord's Supper.

Don't get any ideas! If the smell of bread permeated our sanctuary, I would become so hungry that I couldn't finish my sermon. And if you think that is a good idea, don't tell me.

Most Sundays, they did not consume all of the bread that was baked. There would be few loaves left over, so a handful of folks would be fortunate enough to take one home. Kim remembers the day that she received one of the prized loaves. It was sweet, lightly browned, crusty on the outside, soft on the inside, and still warm. Someone bagged it for her, and she remembers carrying it to her car like it was a baby. She was hungry, and this bread was going to make a wonderful lunch.

After buckling into her seat, she headed for home. She drove up Peachtree Street – because almost all the streets in Atlanta are called Peachtree Street – then took a right onto Ellis, the last turn before hitting the highway. And that's when it happened.

She spotted two men sitting on the sidewalk about thirty feet apart. They looked a bit ragged. One was younger and one was older. They had nothing; no sleeping bags, no pieces of cardboard, no backpacks. But Kim knew what was going to happen next. She was going to have to give up her sweet loaf of bread, because they clearly needed it more than she did. Reluctantly, she eased her car over to the curb and came to a stop. She motioned to the younger man, and he leapt up and came over to her car.

"Here," she said, handing him the still-warm loaf. "This is for you and the other gentleman to share." The man took the bread, said "Thank you," and walked over to the older man. And then, Kim said, "Like a priest, he leaned down, broke the bread, and gave half of it away."

Communion liturgy flashed through her mind. He gave thanks, he blessed it, he broke it, and he gave it. Right before her eyes, these two men acted out the Lord's Supper there on a gritty sidewalk in the middle of Atlanta."<sup>1</sup>

What if we believed – believed deep in our soul – that the way we treat one another is not simply a matter of good manners and being polite, but a genuine reflection of our commitment to God? What if we took seriously – completely seriously – that the way we treat others is the way we treat Jesus? That's what he said. "Whenever you fed, clothed, visited, or welcomed someone in need, you did it to me."

Today's passage comes from a letter written by the Apostle Paul to the congregation in Philippi. Whereas the church in Corinth, in southern Greece, was shredding itself by splitting into factions, the church up north in Philippi brought Paul immense joy because it was united. Perhaps with the divisive congregation in Corinth in the back of his mind, Paul encouraged the Christians in Philippi to remain together and to radiate love for one another.

Paul wrote, "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love...then make my joy complete by being like-minded, have the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind."

Wait a second. What does Paul mean when he says, "Be of one mind?" The Greek text could also be translated "think the same thing." Many of us take umbrage at such talk. We believe it's better to have freedom of thought and freedom of expression. So what is Paul encouraging? It sounds like groupthink at best and brainwashing at worst.<sup>2</sup>

Now, if Paul is expecting everyone to be of the same mind in the sense of having the same opinions, then we could legitimately question whether Paul had slipped and banged his head. But I don't believe that is what Paul intends.

A colleague points out that the *First Nations* translation of this passage thinks Paul is encouraging the Philippians not to conform to one particular way of seeing the world but rather to walk side by side; not to have the same opinions, but to have the same kinds of thoughts that Jesus had: compassion for people who are hurting, justice for those treated unfairly, forgiveness for those who wrong us, hospitality to strangers.

This same interpreter points out that professor Brené Brown's research into the idea of belonging has found that many people are experiencing a sense of "spiritual disconnection – a diminishing sense of shared humanity...People deeply desire to be a part of something and to experience real connection with others...but not at the cost of their authenticity or freedom...(Brown laments the loss of that spirit that says) 'Yes, we are different in many ways, but under it all we are deeply connected.'"<sup>3</sup>

In his Letter to the Church in Philippi, I think Paul is pointing to their interconnectedness. It seems apparent that they care for each other, respect each other, lean on each other, and look out for each other. And he points out to them how they can maintain this bond that unites them. The key, Paul says, is to refrain from putting yourself above others. Instead, maintain a spirit of humility and look first to the interests of others. Paul said that Jesus humbled himself and became a servant to others and we are to have the same mind as Jesus.

We know that this is a winning formula for a rich marriage. Focus on how you can help your spouse before you think about how your spouse can help you. It is a winning formula in a deep friendship. How can I help you? Before: How can you help me? It is a winning formula in a church. How can I build up the church? Before: How can the church benefit me?

It is also the creed that made this nation great in the past. People asked what they could do for the good of the country instead of only focusing on what the country could do for them. It is the spirit of sacrifice for a greater good that prompts men and women to go into military service. They put their lives on the line for the good of the nation, rather than whining, "What am I going to get out of this?"

Pastor Agnes Norfleet tells the story of Fauzia Sufizada who immigrated to Australia from Afghanistan. Fauzia tells the story of how she learned to share her bread with her neighbors. Because Afghanistan is in the heart of Asia, the country is made up of many ethnic groups. Her grandfather moved from Uzbekistan to Afghanistan after World War II. So Fauzia grew up in Kabul, but drank tea, and baked bread from Uzbekistan. From her childhood, she had a passion, not only for making bread, but sharing it with her neighbors. She says that when she first moved to Australia and was a guest at someone's house, she was surprised when they said, "Would you like coffee or juice?"

In her home culture, you never asked; you just served. So when she makes bread, she always bakes enough to serve three neighbors. She takes bread to the neighbor across the street, to the neighbor to the left, and to the right. "As you know," she said, "when you move to a new country, it's difficult to get used to a new culture, the way people talk, the way people think, the way they eat. So, I find that sharing food is the best way to connect."

Fauzia's story of sharing - to the neighbor opposite, and the one on the right, and the one on the left echoes the familiar invitation to the table: they will come from east and west, from north and south, and take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Her story reminds us on this World Communion Sunday, that we come in the midst of a world where far too many people do not have enough to eat, and there is far too little sharing."<sup>4</sup>

Pastor Tom Are says, "For those of us who grew up with siblings, one thing we knew is that we could never go to our parents and say, 'I want you to care for me, but forget about that good-for-nothing brother of mine. Just care about me. We knew that would never happen.'"

"The same is true with God. God is not going to care about some of God's children and neglect the rest of the family."<sup>5</sup> If we seek to have the mind of Christ, we will be mindful of our siblings in Christ."

The bread we will receive during our celebration of the Lord's Supper is not intended to fill our stomachs, but rather to fill our hearts. The different breads are to remind us of the many different people and cultures with whom we are united in our faith in Christ.

When we take the Lord's Supper today, I want us to remember that Jesus has a strong bias. His bias is toward reconciliation and unity. He called on us to welcome strangers and to think of them not as the OTHER, but as sister or brother.

Is our faith strong enough to do that?

#### NOTES

1. Thomas G. Long, "Tread Marks and Roses: Glimpses of Resurrection," *Journal for Preachers*: Easter 2021, p.5.
2. Liz Cooledge Jenkins, "Sunday's Coming," *The Christian Century*, September 25, 2023.
3. Ibid.
4. Tom Are, "This Is Not the Time for Trivia," April 22, 2018.