

THE JOY OF COMMUNITY

Soul is a great movie that unfortunately was overlooked because it was released during COVID. Our souls crave community, because our Creator is a communal God, we were made for community.

We see this in TV shows like Cheers, the Office, movies like Fast & The Furious, Lord of the Rings, and this Church

These are all examples of found family, the creation of community in places outside of our households: a bar, a workplace, a street racing group, a quest to destroy the one ring, and a community of believers. These community groups are built of people from all different backgrounds but who come together in unity and community over a common goal.

Paul will express these same wishes for the church in Philippi: Learn to get along and find joy in this community for the sake of Christ.

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-4 ESV

1 So if there be any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by being 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 count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

The **IF** in the verse it's not the "if" of doubt, but of argument. The verse lists four great considerations, which should draw believers together in harmony and cooperation. Its like Paul is saying:

"This whole following Jesus thing, it been pretty good for you, right? You are loved by the Creator of the Universe, you've been encouraged, you've enjoyed the feeling of being around others believers You've felt supported. Wouldn't you say all of these things have made you a more loving and compassionate person? So, we should all be able to get along and live in harmony with one another?"

This appeal for unity is based on common devotion to Christ and common possession of the Holy Spirit. With all the benefits of being believers in Christ, the members of his body should have unity of purpose, affection, accord, sympathy.

“Being of the same mind” some other versions might say “being like-minded”: does this mean that all Christians are expected to think and act alike? Not at all. While we are definitely expected to agree on the great fundamentals of the Christian faith, it is obvious that on many minor details, there will be a great deal of difference of opinion. Uniformity and unity are not the same thing. Uniformity is acting and looking the same. Like a uniform. Unity allows for differences to exist amongst a community because those differences are not as important as the main goal.

Solidarity by Five Iron Frenzy, 2000

*While the light is growing dim
Make war to keep your faith in him
Knowing what has made us free
Unity, not uniformity
One world, one voice, in trenches we stand tall
One truth has found us
One shepherd for us all*

*Unity the verb, solidarity
You the truth have heard, solidarity
Rise up to the call, solidarity
United we can never fall
Let one voice ring throughout the world
Let truth be sown, let us lay our own lives down
A greater love was never found*

To be like minded, it really means to have the mind of Christ, and that’s what we should be striving for anyways, right? “Christian means ‘Little Christ.’” To be like-minded is to see things as he would see them, and to respond as he would respond. To have the same love means to show the same love to others, that the Lord is shown to us, a love that did not count the cost. Its not real love if you’re constantly telling those you love, what it costs you to love them.

“I love you, but do you know how much its costs me to come see you?”
“I love you but you know its costing me cool points, because my friends think you’re lame.”
“I love you you, but do I gotta pay for your food too, in this economy?”
That’s not real love.

To be of one accord means to work together in harmony toward a common goal. Finally, to be of one mind means to act so unitedly as to show that Christ's mind is directing our activities.

This is how Christian Community should function. This should be the natural result of loving God and being loved by God. We should love those that God loves. God’s love cannot be stopped; thriving

community cannot be stopped if you truly love God. If loving community is not happening, its not because of God, (its probably because of you).

So, what gets in the way?

The two greatest of enemies of unity are selfish ambition and conceit.

Selfish ambition is the desire to be number one, no matter what the cost. Conceit speaks of pride or self display.

William McDonald writes in his Commentary on Philippians: "Wherever you find people who are interested in gathering a clique around themselves, or in promoting their own interests, there, you will find the seeds of contention and strife."

Self ambition and conceit say, "I need to be heard, I need to be recognized, and I need to be right. And you have to agree with me." This. This ruins everything.

The fact that we are all in Christ should keep us in unity. No person can walk in disunity with their fellow believers and in unity with Christ. You may be in disunity with your fellow believers and THINK you still in unity with Christ, but Scripture says otherwise.

The power of Christian love should keep us in unity. It is not a mere reaction of the heart, as human love is; it is a victory of the will, it is a choice achieved by the help of Jesus Christ.

It does not mean loving, only those who love us; or those whom we like; or those who we deem lovable. It means an unconquerable goodwill even to those who hate us, to those whom we do not like, to those who we deem unlovely.

Richard Tatlock in *My Father's House* writes: "Hell is the eternal condition of those who have made relationship with God and their fellows an impossibility through lives, which have destroyed love... heaven, on the other hand is the eternal condition of those who have found real life in relationships through love with God and their fellows."

Paul's last appeal is the personal one. He cannot be happy as long as he knows, there is disunity in the church, which is dear to him. They would complete his joy, if they completed their fellowship. It is not with a threat that Paul speaks to the Christians of Philippi, but with the appeal of love, which is echoed in the heart of a pastor and is echoed in the heart of God. If you love me, complete my joy by being in unity with your community.

The remedy is found in the latter part of the verse. Consider each other greater than yourselves. This doesn't mean we need to consider criminals as having better moral character than our own, but rather we should live for others, unselfishly, putting their interest above our own.

It is much easier to tell you, than to put it into actual practice. To esteem others better than ourselves is utterly foreign to the human mind. And we cannot do it in our own strength. It is only as we are in

dwelt and empowered by the Holy Spirit, that it can ever be practiced. But it is what he has asked us to do.

So let's address the elephant in the room. First Presbyterian Church of Upland, my beloved congregation, I have addressed similar issues in many of my sermons over the past three years. I've snuck it into my sermons like you would sneak medicine to a dog in a treat, hoping you would hear the voice of God and change, but now its time to speak plainly. May you have ears to hear:

There are people in this church who have been fighting with each other for three years. And the Apostle Paul is saying to you, for the love of Christ stop fighting and be unified. Because Your love for Christ, and your dedication to His mission of sharing the Good News of His death, burial, resurrection, the forgiveness of our sins, and the promise of eternal life is greater than any petty squabbling you may have.

So put aside your selfish desires and your vanity which demands to be heard and which demands to be right. And instead humble yourselves for the sake of the mission, because your fighting is not helping but destroying God's church and your witness.

I don't want you to come to the door on your way out and tell me "Nice sermon" but then come back next week and glower at someone in the pews, or to continue to gossip and dredge up old issues and squabbles.

Humble yourself, because it is what Christ did.

With the next part of the chapter Paul says "Let me show you what true humility looks like."

He describes Jesus our Savior enthroned in the heavens and he comes to earth in humility and anonymity. He lives a humble life. He doesn't profit off his powers or teachings or miracles, he gives God all the glory.

He doesn't demand preferential treatment, he allowed Himself to be treated unfairly, (he had the power to stop it at any time), he experienced our pain and died a unfair death, a humiliating death, a cruel death. And he did it for our sake. And He asks us to follow Him in the same humility, putting aside ourselves, sacrificing our conceit and vanity at the foot of the cross, for the sake of the mission, for the sake of each other for the sake of Christ.

And to experience the joy of community he has in store for us.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

Philippians 2:1-14

- What is the overall tone or message that Paul is conveying in these verses?
- How do these elements of comfort, love, fellowship, affection, and compassion lead to the call for unity in verse 2?
- What does it mean to "have the same mind" as Christ (verse 2)?
- How does Paul's description of Christ's humility (verses 5-8) serve as a model for believers?
- What does it mean to "be of the same mind" (verse 5) and to "count others more important" (verse 4)?
- What can we learn from Christ's obedience and his willingness to suffer for us?
- How do verses 9-11 encourage us to focus on God's glory rather than our own?