

The Rev. Dr. David K. McIntosh
Sept. 27, 2020- 17th Sun After Pentecost (Proper 21A)
Given at St. Mark's Church, Bridgewater, CT

Psalm 25; **Philippians 2: 1-13; Matthew 21:23-32**

**“If then there is any encouragement in Christ... be of the same mind,
having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.” †**

“Be of the same mind... of one accord and of one mind.” A strong message to hear as we gather together on this morning, when it seems everything in our society encourages just the opposite. These words are from St. Paul, writing to a community that he established many years before. When he lived in Philippi, he is said to have been a leather worker, and as he went about performing his work, he would simply chat with those he worked with and who hired him, and talk about Jesus... of what Jesus said, and taught, and did on this earth. And as people heard, they often became followers, Christians. He writes to remind them of this— Be of one mind. Do nothing for self-ambition or conceit. In humility, regard others as better than yourselves. Work not at your own interests, but at the interests of others.

Such important words for us to hear today, when our nation is divided and not speaking or acting with any sense of unity. There is turmoil and stress— fires are burning, not just in the forests but in the streets, poor folk are getting poorer and losing jobs, sick people are getting sicker, and those in power (on *both* sides) are laying blame anyone but themselves. It seems we are living in a world of chaos, self-ambition, and conceit. Sometimes, I wonder if I'm in some strange reality television show. Though this world, in the COVID-19 era, often feels entirely 'virtual,' life is not virtual... this is not a dream, its real! And living in this wild world starts with accepting and believing that God entered into it, in the flesh, to teach us how we should act. This is what St. Paul is speaking about in this letter, in this passage that became part of a very ancient hymn of the early Church.

In essence he says (again, let me paraphrase my own translation. By the way Paul's Greek is so much more succinct than the English, its 25% shorter!): “If the Spirit and your faith mean anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care, then: Agree with one another, love each other, be caring friends. Don't push your way up front, put yourself aside and help others get ahead. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand. Think of yourselves the way Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God, but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages. He set aside the privileges of being divine and took on the status of a lowly human. It was an incredibly humbling process!” (The word here is *kenosis*... he 'humbled himself,' or more accurately he 'emptied himself.') “He did not claim special privileges, instead he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death. He humbled himself and took on the form of a slave, humbling himself to the point of death by a horrible torture that was reserved for traitors.”

And Paul goes on to remind them and us that paradoxically, Christ's voluntary entrance into bondage and death became our liberation.

So, if we want to become like Christ and follow his ways, we must begin by understanding just how hard, unthinkable, and unimaginable it was for Christ to become like us, and how incomprehensible it is that he still comes to us today! Be of one mind, "for its God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure." It is God who is at work in you...

I think I'll end here, as this is a good segue into the many things we, as the Episcopal Church in CT, as Christians in the NW Hills of Connecticut, are doing in our region. I hope he'll share some of the many opportunities each of us have, to contribute in our own way (for none of us is the same or can do the same things) to the needs of others. So, I ask Dylan, our NW region Missionary to share some possibilities.

†