

The Mind of Christ

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7)



Paul is writing to the Philippians from prison. Yet he still finds the boldness and spirit to encourage them to rejoice always. He even promises them a peace that is beyond understanding. If, like me, Covid isolation and social unrest are worrying your spirit, you probably want a dose of whatever it is that Paul's got.

If you are in painful conflict with someone in your family, church or community, today's message is for you.

If you are imprisoned by the pandemic, anxious for a society that feels like it's coming apart at the seams, today's message is for you.

If prayer can seem more obligation than joy, a futile effort against failing hope, today's message is for you.

And yes, if you yearn to be guarded by a Godly peace, today's message is for you.

The problem is that Paul is long on exhortation, short on explanation. What *is* this medicine the apostle is offering us?

I was reminded of the answer during recent difficulties with someone I love very much. My friend was in deep spiritual crisis, which I found powerless to relieve. And as the election season progressed, we found ourselves arguing over positions that the other felt were eminently unreasonable and stupid. I prayed about all this. But that didn't seem to be helping much. I was increasingly worried.

So I brought my concerns to a spiritually wise colleague. She agreed this was a matter that required God's grace. We talked about my frustration with prayer. She suggested that when I pray, I visualize my friend lit from within by God's light.

It was a light bulb moment for me. I realized that I had been praying out of my own fears. I was asking for God's help, but it felt like *I* was doing the work. As I imagined my friend enveloped in God's radiant love, I began to genuinely turn his care and our differences over to the Shepherd that guards us all. I began to feel God saying grace over our difficulties. And I opened to a deeper experience of what it means to be a Christian.

Paul would put it this way: I was seeing the world with the mind of Christ. The mind of Christ is a major theme of Paul's letter to the Philippians. Earlier in his letter, he tells them: "*Be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord... Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.*" (Philippians 2:2,5) Today, he specifically urges two disputing church members "*to be of the same mind in the Lord.*" (Philippians 4:2)

Having the mind of Christ means seeing the world through the eyes of God's Son. Jesus shared his Father's abiding love for his children. He understood and acted on his Father's determination to heal and make whole all that is broken in creation.

Jesus could see and do this because of his intimate relationship with the Father. A love between divine parent and child that surpasses our human understanding. That love led him to do his Father's will. To go to the cross. To rise up from the dead.

By our baptism into Christ's death and resurrection, we are invited into that same familial relationship. The love between the Father and Son. Their Holy Spirit abiding in the heart of creation. Resting in our hearts, lighting us up from within. Healing what is broken. Making us whole. Bringing peace.

By baptismal grace, *"we have the mind of Christ."* (1 Corinthians 1:16b) We are able to understand the good news as Christ sees it: God loves us. All of us. Every day, all the time. God guides our waking and guards our sleeping. (BCP, 134) By the power of the cross, God conquered fear, defeated evil, and assured us of eternal life.

When we live by this sure knowledge, when we live with the mind of Christ, we can work through our differences with love. For *"Love...does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth."* (1 Corinthians 13:5,6)

With the mind of Christ, though imprisoned by pandemic and crazy times, we can still rejoice. For by the power of the cross, the victory over sin is already won. *"The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything."* (Philippians 4:5b-6a)

With the mind of Christ, our prayer life becomes a journey to green pastures and still waters, led by the shepherd who already knows our fears, our hopes, and our needs. *"He revives my soul * and guides me along right pathways for his Name's sake."* (Psalm 23:3)

With the mind of Christ, every pore of our being opens to receive God's peace, guarding our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7b)

We are fretful children. It's so easy to succumb to worrisome thinking; to stray from the mind of Christ. We need constant reassurance of our Father's love and the peace it brings. As Jesus tells the synagogue leader whose daughter is at the point of death: *"Do not fear, only believe."* (Mark 5:36) At the Last Supper and after the resurrection, Jesus bid peace to his disciples. In our Anglican tradition, the priest often bids a departing blessing that *"The Peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord."* (1928 BCP)

Perhaps the best reassurance is what we can offer each other. It's really quite simple. Paul tells us, *"Let your gentleness be known to everyone."* (Philippians 4:5a) Gentleness. One of the fruits of the Spirit. A healing balm for anxious times. For the giver as well as the receiver.

Let us pray: Father, in the remaining weeks of this election season, in the remaining months of this pandemic, fill us with your Spirit of gentleness. Help us be gentle with each other and with ourselves. And may our gentleness be a gateway to your peace. In Christ's name and with Christ's mind we pray. Amen.