

# 'Have this mind in you that was in Christ Jesus'

Sermon at St James Lower Hutt by the Rev Derek Lightbourne, October 1<sup>st</sup> 2017

Theme passage: Philippians 2.1 – 11

Please take a moment, if you will, to think back to your childhood or as a young person. Who was a significant person for you beyond your parents? A grandparent perhaps, or an uncle or aunt. How was this person significant for you?.....

For me it was an uncle, after whom I was named. My memory of my Uncle Derek was of his service in the Fleet Air Arm of the Royal Navy in the War. He had sailed to Britain, enlisted as a pilot and became a Lieutenant Commander. I can in my mind's eye see him landing his small fighter plane on an aircraft carrier in the midst of a heaving ocean. And to see him in that distinctive wool lined flight jacket. Two words would most describe him – of courage and adventure. In a sense for me he was a role model – on returning home he went to teacher's college and for his life, sadly cut shorter by cancer, he had teaching positions. That was going to be my vocation until the call came to offer for Ordination. If not so much the courage, I certainly identify with him in the adventure aspect. But then, to voyage down to the Southern Ocean south of New Zealand, that does take some courage, bearing in mind encountering eight metre swells. And I'm going again in January.

This introduction is to share something of what the relationship was like between St Paul and Jesus. Paul first met Jesus on the Damascus road, and from there had every admiration for Jesus. The reading today from his letter to the Philippians describes aspects of this close relationship and admiration for Jesus.

1) Paul begins the section on relationships - in my paraphrase: '*If Jesus means anything to you, then you will be....* 'of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.' That's a pretty powerful call for common accord in the Christian community.

Paul then lists some common causes of *disunity* – he names selfish ambition, personal prestige, and concentration on self rather than having concern for others. He must have been aware of these human traits arising in the early church. I sometimes think that's not a bad aspect, for if there were not those issues there would have been no reason for writing the letters and we would have been the worse off.

What's important here though is the *positive* - and St Paul certainly makes the point of the value of unity in the church community. The quality of humility is mentioned – that is a factor that can help – looking to other's interests rather than one's own. My I suggest here though if I am honest I consider that it is acceptable to ask oneself, 'what's in it for me being a member of the congregation of St James'. After all each here has chosen to make this church your spiritual home. Beyond that though, it is how we are towards others in the church and to those not of this community that counts lots.

May I venture to suggest there's special relevance for the *call to unity* at this time in this church. This is based on the place of *prayer* currently relating to leadership in the parish. (The Rev) Jean has left after 10 years valuable ministry, and the leadership presently are seeking – and praying for someone who will complement the present leadership and bring 'value-added'.

This is where prayer fits along with unity in the membership – as I'm mindful of Jesus' words, 'Where two or more on earth agree about anything you ask it will be done for you in heaven. For where two or more are gathered in my name I am there among them.' (Mt 18.19). What it means in our context is to emphasise the important task of praying for the leading of God's Spirit for what and who will be in ministry leadership in the parish.

Remember also it was as the early believers *met together in prayer* after the Ascension. They weren't at all sure of the future so as Luke describes, 'all these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer...and that led to the outpouring of Holy Spirit, and they didn't look back. I'm mindful too of that powerful prayer of the early church believers when they were in a critical situation of persecution and again Luke describes '..they all joined together in prayer to God', a prayer to the awesomeness of the Divine One: 'Sovereign God, who made the heaven and earth, the sea and everything in them,.....

'They *all joined together in prayer* to God....- that's also our call. Ministry leadership is critical, and please as you pray let it be also with those tasked with the selection, that their eyes and ears be open to see and hear what is God's prompting.

2) That then is the first section of this portion of the letter, a powerful call to unity. Then secondly, there's a joining verse to the next section, and it's the theme of this sermon: '*Have this mind in you that was in Christ Jesus.*' That's what was in Paul's mind as he wrote to the Philippians, a connecting of what is in our human minds to what we believe is in Jesus' mind. It is what we express figuratively as 'in our hearts'. Philippi is in Greece, and the Greek understanding is expressed as being one's *psyche*, considered to be the mix of sensations, affections, desires, and passions in the human person. It is that which makes us who we are. Thus to incorporate the 'mind that was in Christ Jesus,' one might quote from another of St Paul's prayers: 'that you may be strengthened in your inner being, with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.' (3.17).

3) Time doesn't allow to go into the detail but as the passage goes into what might be described as a hymn to Jesus, noted Bible commentator William Barclay wrote 'It would be true to say that in many ways this is the greatest and most moving passage Paul ever wrote about Jesus.' That connects with my opening description of the esteem St Paul had for Jesus the Christ.

Rather than go into detail about aspects I'd like to let it stand in its own power. Our NZ Prayer Book compilers recognised it as a hymn so let me conclude with reading that version, entitled '*The Exalted Lord*'.

'Christ Jesus was in the form of God, yet he did not think to grasp at equality with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, and was born in human likeness. Being found in our human state he humbled himself and became unto death even death on a cross.

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every Name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.'

