

A Sermon for DaySpring

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“This Mind in You”

Philippians 2: 1-5

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I think it's important to imagine what gave rise to Paul's letters. There is his calling and passion... there is his great mind at work and his general love for the church and the churches... But there are also people and people that he knows.

So, imagine if you will a guy name Epaphroditus showing up in Rome where Paul is in prison. He's brought some gifts from the church in Philippi. And they spend some time going through them.

Maybe a parchment or two of some poetry or Greek Philosophy...

Maybe there's a version of the gospel that has begun circulating.

I suspect someone made him a quilt or knitted him a new tunic... It has his name embroidered across the back... "Paulos... Apostle of Jesus Christ." (Bet he didn't wear that one)

Maybe there's some dried meat...

Some stewed prunes...

And the fruitcake. (There's only one you know.)

Paul took a look at it... hit it on the table and said to Epaphroditus, **“Pass this on to Timothy, why don't you?”**

I suspect they also brought him a new supply of pen and papyrus.

After they'd gone through the gifts, while they were eating dinner, Paul began to ask questions about the church and Epaphroditus filled him in.

He told him about their new meeting place and about some of the difficulty they were having with city officials.

He described the worship services... and how some folks liked to have the sermon before communion and others liked the sermon last.

He said there'd been new deacon elections and they'd had some interesting and animated discussion about the roles they were to play... whether they were to be more like servants or administrators.

There were new Christians in the church and there was a conversation taking place about how long they were to wait before they were baptized.

Epaphroditus told him about some of the new preachers who seemed to be so eloquent and proud of it.

This was all the typical fare Paul would hear from the churches he'd begun. Paul then reach for another stewed prune and said, **“How are they?”** Knowing Epaphroditus hadn't gotten to the difficult issue.

“Not good,”... knowing Paul was referring to Euodia and Syntyche. Both were leaders in the church and both were very close to Paul. And the truth is, they just didn't like one another.

Always on the opposite side of every issue.

Unable to cut one another any slack.

And never failing to remind folks of the other's weaknesses.

Paul sighed a painful sigh... the sigh of a friend and a leader... who cannot believe these two followers of Jesus are so stuck. He'd worked so hard and taught them and thought they'd heard.

And it was so ironic, because they were so committed to the church. They knew Paul's teachings verbatim. Could sing all the hymns from memory and quote the Baptismal Creed in their sleep.

But... it didn't seem to matter where it mattered most.

That night, after a travel-weary Epaphroditus fell asleep... Paul was restless, so he wrote. And in the letter he pleaded with Euodia and Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord... And he also wrote what we read earlier.

Here he was in jail...

Probably facing death...

His work over, but not completed in their lives.

So he wrote to Euodia and to Syntyche... and to the new pastor who seemed to be in love with his own preaching and to the new deacons who liked the idea of being in charge. And he wrote to those who found themselves irritated with the sermon following communion during worship. He wrote to them all... he wrote to us all...

Make my joy complete...

He wants to cash in some relational chips I think. That's at least part of what is going on. **"If there's any shred of blessedness in your life because you know Christ... do something for me and be like-minded... have one love... the same purpose."**

"Don't have selfish motives...

Be humble...

Care for each other's issues."

"Your mind should be just like the mind of Christ."

It is so personal for him and it's painful for him... that's for sure. **"Would you guys do this for me?"**

But if I know Paul... he's not simply trying to get his own angst soothed... he is giving to them a spiritual teaching that is absolutely central to their faith and to ours.

We live, just like Euodia and Syntyche, with all sorts of agendas... many of them unconscious. Wants, desires, expectations, felt needs... we seem to come out of the womb this way, but certainly life and culture and circumstance creates a kind of self that is full of stuff... and we're all different, aren't we? My issues are different than yours.

There are desires and needs of the ego, what Paul would call the flesh desires. Euodia... had this small self, this need for everyone to always agree with her and when they didn't she got very anxious. Syntyche??? She had this expectation that she must be in control and when that was frustrated she got angry.

Or... maybe Syntyche's desire was for affection...

and so she felt rejected easily.

Or Euodia found herself so hungry for material things...

And it wasn't just the two of them. There was the guy who was angry that he was having to go through baptismal classes and memorize Jesus' teachings. He was a leader in the community and it just rubbed him the wrong way.

And there was that preacher... who was so competitive and he really wasn't conscious of it but he was driven to be the best, and it wasn't so God would be glorified.

Epaphroditus had a tendency to feel lonely and rejected if his needs for friendship weren't met.

Paul could see this in the church... small selves and egos and flesh... bumping into one another... it's the way things are... And he knew it because he dealt with it. Sometimes, **“the loving things he wanted to do, he just could not do.”**

So he writes... in his desire for his own joy to be complete... but also because he is certain this is work they must do in order for their joy to be complete.

“Have this mind...” some translate it **“this attitude in you that was in Christ Jesus.”** It's a way of thinking... inside. **“Have what was deep within Jesus... deep within you.”**

And then Paul reminds them of a song they all knew. Maybe a favorite there in Philippi. Kind of a first century “Pass it On.” And it's a song that describes what has come to be called ‘the way of descent.’

“Jesus who being the very nature of God did not cling, he wasn't grasping, to any right... but emptied himself... made himself nothing... became a servant... and humbled himself even unto death.”

It's the way of descent... the ‘Sign of Jonah,’ Jesus called it. Remember Jonah? He goes down into Joppa, into the ship, down into the sea and into the belly of the fish. That's the sign... to go down. It is the way of the cross... where the only way up is to go down... it's the only hope... humbling ourselves.

What do you suppose happened when the folks at Philippi read this. I suspect they all got real quiet, concentrated real hard on being humble... and after a few minutes, as they were getting it down, they were thinking, **“man, we're pretty good at this.”**

Humility isn't necessarily chosen, is it?

And thinking of others as better than yourself is not only counter-intuitive, but is offensive to all we learned in the 'seventies about self-esteem and how “I'm okay and you're okay.” **“Think of someone as better? On purpose?”**

Selfish ambition can't be done away with in a couple of bedtime prayers, can it? And emptying yourself... becoming nothing... nada... there's just no reflex for that.

But there can be. That's what our church must be about, helping each other develop different instincts. And this is the place... the church... because Euodia and Syntyche will absolutely keep bumping into one another.

My small self and emotional agendas and needs will meet up with yours... And we'll not only need to hear Paul's challenge to be humble, but will need to be taught the way of descent. We'll have to practice it.

And there are methods...

ways of praying...

disciplines to learn and be faithful to.
Ask... we're ready to teach.

There are things to do... work to be done... And please know that it's work... all of the Desert Fathers, those who fled society to learn the ways of God, talk about how important humility is and how long it takes to learn. And they were ruthless about it... tenacious.

One teacher said that humility is to pardon our brother who has wronged us before he himself asks for it. (Sayings of the Desert Fathers)

Another said, "If someone accuses you of something you have done, or not done, and you keep silent, this is in conformity with the nature of Jesus." (SDF)

Another father said humility is to do good to those who do evil to you, and if that's not possible, then flee those who offend you and... and remain silent. (SDF)

This is a real challenge... being nothing. It's advanced spirituality. It's what some call "interior monasticism." Rising only by falling. Jesus says, "**He who seeks only himself brings himself to ruin, whereas he who brings himself to nothing for my sake discovers who he is.**"

Euodia comes to know the real Euodia by letting go of and turning away from all those little agendas and needs. Syntyche cannot live in reaction to her feelings... She must not live a life in reaction but rather in response to love. She must train herself and then... she must trust in God's grace working within her to transform her.

And please hear that today... Euodia says yes... she works... but it is God's work that transforms her. We consent in faith and God works in us.

The second part of the hymn is so important. "**Therefore God has exalted him.**" Even Jesus must trust God to be raised up. Jesus is humbly obedient... even unto death and is raised up. The only way up, the only way to life... is by letting go and descending. Being nothing and trusting in God. That is all there is.

We share a meal today. A meal that reminds of us of the loving descent of God into our midst to be our servant.

A meal that challenges us to do the same for one another.

But even more importantly, a meal that we take in. To take and eat is to consent. We take in the essence of... the body and blood of Christ... to the deepest place within us. As you come to this table, let that be your prayer and intention... that this mind that was in Christ Jesus will be in you.

This is the body of Christ, broken for you. This is the cup of our salvation. Come, take all of it.