

*In the name of God, who makes us, loves us, and keeps us. Amen*

It is said that each preacher really has only one sermon, and preaches that same sermon over and over again in different words with different examples, but with essentially the same message. So, here's mine:

Paul, writing from prison to the members of the church in Philippi, tells them: if you find any encouragement in Christ, if you find in your relationship with Christ any source of courage, consolation from the way of love, a sharing of the Spirit, if the Spirit seems to fill you with inspiration when you gather together, and if you find any compassion and sympathy in your relationship with Christ and one another, then be of one mind. Namely, the mind of Christ. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ. Paul then goes on to quote, scholars think, a hymn text thought to be an early attempt at understanding Christology, the nature of Christ Jesus. In this early Christian lyric, Christ is described as humbling himself to be born in human likeness, being obedient to God's will, and receiving a holy and authoritative name which all will honor.

The nature of Jesus, and his relationship with God the Father, is an abiding mystery, one which Christology struggles to explain. It remains, however, in large part, mysterious. And that's okay with me. I'm willing to live with that question. I'm pleased, in fact, to let that question captivate and motivate me. I do, in fact, find encouragement when I consider that mystery. I find consolation in the love that mystery professes. When savoring that mystery together with others, with you, I do find compassion and spiritual inspiration. So, living with the questions about the incarnation of Christ as Son of God and Son of Man is something I can put my heart and mind into. I think I can have the same mindset that the mystery provokes, that I can even find the peace which passes all understanding, yet keeps my heart and mind in the dialectic of the knowledge and love of God, and of God's Son, Jesus Christ. It passes all understanding, but still brings me peace. It is a mystery, and yet just the same brings me courage. And Jesus asks: "what do you think?"

And the consideration of the mystery reveals some provocative clues: Like the landowner in the parable Jesus tells, the Father has built up a vineyard for his sons, for his children. Now, in the scriptures of the Old Testament, the ones with which Jesus' audience there in the Jerusalem Temple would have been familiar, a vineyard was often a metaphor for Israel, for the community which was faithful to God. God had created, established, and nurtured that vineyard. God the father did all that with his children in mind, that they should have a good life and a valuable heritage. God built the trellises, planted the seeds, groomed the vines, made improvements to the property, cared for the vintage, and all for the benefit of posterity. This is an important clue, I think, to appreciating the mystery: God creates. God creates opportunities. And God seems to create with us in mind. Now, when God created us, and placed us in the Garden, we were given the choice of whether or not to receive those opportunities and make good use of them, to preserve and enrich them for the glory of God and God's purpose, or not.

When I consider the resources we have at hand when we seek to live out the questions, the mysteries, of Christ's nature, when I use the available scriptures, the thoughts of church leaders and theologians like Paul, and my own spiritual experiences, I find even more clues. It seems that God in Christ has a will, a purpose, an intent, a visionary dream, so to speak. Now, if, as they say, God is love, then it means, I suppose, that Love has an intent, that Love isn't just a vague feeling or a passing fancy, but that Love is a living being which has a mind of its own, a dream it hopes will come true, a purpose it longs to see come to fulfillment. Love has built a vineyard, which Love intends to reliably bear good fruit. Holy, sacramental fruit. And we have the opportunity to cultivate that fruit. We might even become that fruit ourselves, if we want. Love has an intent, and if we share that intent, if any or all of us vow to align ourselves with God's intent, and dream the same dream that God has had since before the beginning of time, well, we could call that sacramental. A sacrament is, for us, when the spinning gears of our own lives mesh with the creative turning of God's own gear, and we apprehend and share Love's powerful intent.

But let's not forget that we each have been created uniquely, with our own particular gifts and talents, in different times and places and situations. And it may be that that is, in fact, by design. As different members of the Body of Christ, as they say, as our resources say, we may each have unique tasks we can accomplish in the great vineyard. If that is true, then perhaps we each apprehend God differently, depending on our gear-ratio. We may not, in fact, receive, recognize, and regard God in the same exact way. Some might apprehend God in the birdsong of the early morning, some in the bustling activity of the city street, some in the printed word of captivating books, others in the music of the spheres, some in the repetitive comfort of a chant, others in the shrill voice of children. When Paul asks that we all be of one mind, when he says that will make his joy complete, I can't imagine that he expects that all our gears will perform exactly the same when they engage with God. It was Paul, for fact, who invented the metaphor of the Body of Christ with its different working members, each of whom had the opportunity to do different tasks with different skills and abilities. More than once he describes faith communities as working that way, sometimes coherently and sometimes with conflict.

Have you been confirmed? Have you given your Bishop the opportunity to lay hands on you in the sacramental rite of confirmation? Notice, we call it "confirmation", not "conformation". The diversity of God's kingdom is as sacred as its vision, I think. No two people can be expected to have the same opinion on every topic of discussion, and there's nothing more boring than a community where everyone conforms and thinks the same, has the same personality, the same mode of speech, the same exact laugh, the same sensitivities, the same walk, and so on. And yet Paul hopes we and the Philippians, for whom he has great affection BTW, will all have the same mind set. Perhaps think of it this way: As God's great clockwork is turning, as Love's great vision is moving forward, we each have the opportunity to have engagement with that movement in mind. And in heart, too. Our engagement might be different, but we will be connected to the dream just the same. The sameness is in our confirmation of our calling to work faithfully in the vineyard, some digging the soil, some carrying baskets of grapes on their backs, some shewing-away the crows and squirrels, but each confirming that we share the dream that really good wine may be made from God's vintage.

And in Jesus' parable today we can find another clue to the mystery we are called to live: We, like the two sons, have the freedom to make up their own hearts and minds about engaging with all that God-movement. Some, despite making their sacramental baptismal vows, and even publicly confirming them, have the free-will to ignore them. And others who scoff at such vows have the possibility, the freedom, to change their minds. Which of the two did the will of his father? Which of the two ultimately chose to engage with God's visionary dream? What do you think? Do you think that, given the authority which ought to be accorded to the creator, they should have had a choice, whether God liked it or not? Notice that in the hymn text which Paul quotes, the verse says: "every knee *should* bend, and every tongue *should* confess to the authority of Christ Jesus, not that they are somehow forced to. Unlike the temple elders who are trying to trap Jesus into a theological corner, and who expect to have complete authority over the behavior of the crowds, the authority of Jesus is based in the creation, in the dream, in the incarnation of that dream among us as example and savior and friend. His kingdom is a gift, if you ask me, not a corral into which we are all shepherded by force.

So, given the created opportunities, the freedom to make up our own minds, the calling to engage with the intentions of the visionary dream, the promise of healing and restoration, what do you think? Some, both Jesus and Paul point out, have chosen not to engage, but that does not mean that God is not at work in them. Those, like the temple elders, find such poor choices to be an affront to their authority and turn their backs on them. But the mind of Christ, the love that mysteriously is a living being, is nonetheless at work in them, as it is in all creation, to change their minds. Oh, they may continue to disagree about the details with fear and trembling, but Love has the long view, the big picture, the visionary dream, and hopes that none may be left behind. So, that's my sermon. I had fun doing it again. But, as Jesus asked, what do you think? Amen.