

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one in whom we have unity of mind and spirit, Jesus Christ our Lord, amen.

In seminary I did my first in-depth research paper on this very text from Saint Paul's letter to the congregation he founded in the Macedonian city of Philippi. So, this passage is near and dear to my heart... It contains a beautiful song called the Christ Hymn, the origins of which scholars are still debating. Did Paul compose every word in this passage including the Christ Hymn or did he use the words of an ancient hymn that the Church had already incorporated into their worship services? Nobody knows for sure, and I don't think it really matters. The point Paul is making about humbling ourselves and thinking more about others than our own wants and desires that's what we should be hearing from Paul this day...

For some people humility would require a huge change in their mindset and lifestyle. As I thought about this text and tried to relearn the lesson from Saint Paul I kept coming back to this idea of change and what that means for us as Christians. Change is never easy. It almost always involves giving up something in favor of something else. Something must die in order for the new thing to emerge. As I thought about changes that have come about in my lifetime I remembered the first microwave oven we purchased back in 1979 or 80. It was huge and cost us over \$500. Of course, there were no cell phones available to

ordinary people back then. In fact, in my house growing up we had something called a party line where several families shared a single phone line. Sometimes you'd pick up the receiver, which was attached to a cord or to the wall and someone else would be talking on the phone. You had to wait until they were finished before you could make your call... The past 100 years have brought so many changes. I mean jets and rocket ships, landing men on the moon and now the beginning of commercial space travel. I wonder what changes the next 100 years might bring. Will humans have a colony on Mars? Will self-driving or better yet, flying cars, be the norm? Maybe we won't need smartphones any more because our brains will connect directly to the internet and we will finally achieve Paul's dream of being of one mind because all of us will be interconnected.

I don't have a crystal ball for looking into the future, but I think I can predict one thing with reasonable certainty. No matter how much we become interconnected through the internet, human nature will always continue to be sinful and evil by our very nature. Even with all the modern advancements we've made and how our society has progressed over the past we're still the same sinful, disobedient people God created and gave the gift of free will back in the beginning. We've had two horrendous mass shootings just in the past two weeks. One in a grocery store in Buffalo New York and another in the Robb Elementary School in Uvalde Texas. Even with all the modern conveniences and with the best

information systems known to mankind, human nature is still what it has always been, sinful... I see absolutely nothing on the horizon that will change those facts. As far as biblical and historical evidence shows us, human nature, with its “me-first” attitude, hasn't changed since Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden, and it seems unlikely to do so in the next 100 or 1000 years if humans survive that long...

This brings us to our text. In a hundred years we might expect the world to be different in many ways, with lots of stuff we'd think was really cool if we had it today, one thing is without a doubt going to be the same: We're going to have trouble putting the welfare of others ahead of our own. Paul talks to the Philippian Christians about at least eliminating rivalries: “... be of the same mind,” he writes, “having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. ...” In short, he calls them to live in ways that are appropriate to the gospel and that reflect the character of Jesus.

Why would Paul need to say that to Christians? Aren't Christians nice people at their core? It appears that even in the early church, just as in congregations today, people didn't see eye-to-eye on everything. Later in this letter to the Philippians, Paul specifically urges two women in that church -- Euodia and Syntyche – “to be of one mind in the Lord” (4:2), because, apparently, they

weren't. We church people are real people with honest convictions on almost every subject. In some cases, our convictions align; in others they don't. That's true even when we try to line up our opinions in light of what it means to follow Jesus. While we, as a congregation, may be trying to have the same mind as was in Christ Jesus, we, as individual Christians, differ about politics, social problems, lifestyle decisions, the Bible, worship styles and a host of other matters. And when these things get out of hand, churches and even denominations split. Sadly, we have no reason to think that 100 years from now it's going to be any different. Christians are not perfect people, but the one we worship and adore, Jesus Christ is perfect...

The society we live in is no different. After every mass shooting the political left wants more gun control and those on the political right want more emphasis on mental health and social reform. I read a Wall Street Journal editorial this week that said the real problem in our society today is the breakdown of religious and spiritual norms. Being a Christian 50 or 100 years ago was simply expected. Today not so much... People are flocking away from Churches like never before. When Jesus is eliminated from the lives of the masses it's no wonder our base human instincts are allowed to take over and we witness the carnage everywhere.

There is some good news here. Paul is also saying, with Christ as our common ground and with our shared desire to follow him, we who differ can still have a unity of spirit that makes us want to put others in our group first and look beyond our own interests. In fact, this unity of spirit is something that God bestows on us when we seek God together in the church. We should note that in calling members of the Philippian congregation to be of one mind, Paul is not implying that the folks there were not already sincere in their faith and in their living of their faith. Instead, he's calling for them to keep growing and maturing in that faith, to keep moving toward the example of Jesus. That's why we gather together as a community of faith, to both hold each other accountable, but to also encourage one another as we try to "regard others as better than ourselves." The Lord knows this doesn't come naturally to the vast majority of us! It did come naturally to Jesus. That was the whole point of the washing of the disciples feet on Maundy Thursday of Holy Week.

As I dream of a better future for humanity, I think about advances in medicine where body parts can be reproduced in a lab and where every home will have a robot maid like the Jetsons did in the cartoons of my youth. My prayer is that the human race will one day be able to put aside our own pride and self-absorption and think more highly of the other. May we learn from Jesus how to empty ourselves and become a servant of all. Left on our own, I don't see that

happening. Isn't it a good thing we're not left on our own! Through Jesus Christ we can learn from His example how to live our lives for Him and not just for ourselves alone. When we imitate the example of Jesus we can no longer think only of what we want and desire, but our focus is always on what God 's will might be for us. May we put aside all individual selfish desires and work toward the goal of unity in Christ. May the grace and mercy of God our creator and redeemer always encourage us to find our center in Him. Amen.

Before we move on in our worship to confess our faith, let's offer a moment of silence and then a short prayer in recognition and remembrance of those who gave their lives for our Nation... ... Let us pray... Prince of Peace, enfold our war-dead in Your arms; comfort those who mourn them; and help us, and all the nations of the world, live in peace. Amen... Our service now continues with the Nicene Creed...