



Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

September 12, 2021

* *Please stand if you are able*

Prelude: "Psalm 19" Marcello

Arr. John Carter

Gathering

WELCOME & LIGHTING THE CHRIST CANDLE

Acolyte: May the Holy Spirit unite us in worship, point us toward Jesus Christ, and inspire us to love mercy, do justice, and walk humbly with God. Come, let us worship God.

* CALL TO WORSHIP

Liturgist: The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

All: Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.

Liturgist: There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard.

All: Yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the earth.

Liturgist: The glory of God echoes throughout the world.

All: Let us praise the name of the Lord.

Psalm 19:1-4

* **All Singing: 271 "Earth and All Stars"**
Singing verses 1, 3-5

* GOD'S GREETING

* GOD'S PEOPLE GREETING ONE ANOTHER

* **All Singing:** 269 “All Are Welcome”
Singing verses 1, 2, 4, 5

Children ages 4–7 may come forward for a blessing before they leave for “Children in Worship.”

CHILDREN’S BLESSING

Children: The peace of Christ be with you.

All: **And also, with you.**

Reconciliation

Liturgist: Awesome and compassionate God, you have loved us with unfailing, self-giving mercy, but we have not loved you. You constantly call us, but we do not listen.

All: **You ask us to love, but we walk away from neighbors in need, wrapped in our own concerns. We condone evil, prejudice, warfare, and greed.**

Liturgist: Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Silent Confession and Lament

All Singing: “Trisagion” F. Ortega

**Holy God, holy and mighty, holy Immortal One.
Have mercy, have mercy on us.**

Liturgist: God of grace, as you come to us in mercy, we repent in spirit and in truth admit our sin.

All: **With gratitude, we receive your forgiveness, in Christ.**

Liturgist: Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases, yet we account him struck down by God, and afflicted. He was wounded for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities.

All: **Through Christ’s sufferings we are made whole. We are healed by his bruises and washed clean of our sins. Thanks be to God for our redemption and salvation. Amen.**

Isaiah 53:4-6

* **All Singing:** 170 “Man of Sorrows—What a Name”

Proclamation

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

All: **Lord God, let the words of your servant’s mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and Redeemer. Through Christ. Amen.**

Scripture: Philippians 2:1-11

Minister: The Word of the Lord.

All: **Thanks be to God.**

Sermon: The Gospel Among Us

Soloist: "Hope" C. Carlson

We were looking for a home.
Going door to door never felt so alone.
But she knew her, and I knew him.
Maybe there is a place here for us.

Sometimes you find yourself, with nowhere else to go.
You've been pushed aside and you need some way to cope.
Come and find a place at Hope.

You're not welcome there anymore.
Not if you do that, think that, let her lead, love him too.
Who could ever take us now?

But my mom goes there and her dad goes there.
Anywhere but there.
But my mom's still there and her dad's still there.
Why would I be anywhere, but there.

So you've tried to just not go. What does it matter anyway?
But the cross, but grace, but grace, but grace.
But hope. There's still hope.

* **All Singing: 248 "We Are Your People"**

Dedication

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

OFFERING

1. General Fund
2. Elim Christian Services

OFFERTORY

* **All Singing: 551 "All Creatures of Our God and King"**
Singing verse 6

**Let all things their Creator bless,
and worship him in humbleness,
alleluia, alleluia!
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,
and praise the Spirit, Three in One:
O praise him, O praise him,
alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!**

Sending

BENEDICTION

Postlude: "Trumpet Voluntary, No. V, Op. 7" John Stanley

Worship Leaders

Organist / Pianist: Dora Diephouse
Pianist / Preacher: Erin Pacheco
Vocalists: Jan Kosmal
Aron Reppmann
Soloist / Djembe: Clay Carlson

Acolyte: Owen Gabrielse
Liturgist: Anne VanderWeele
Prayer: David VanderWeele

Hymns are from *Lift Up Your Hearts* (Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2013)
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Erin Hollaar Pacheco
Hope CRC
September 12, 2021

THE GOSPEL AMONG US
Philippians 2:1-11

It is good to be gathered – in person and online – for a Hope Homecoming Sunday.

This is an annual tradition. Burgers and brats. Potluck salads and desserts. All manner of groups and programs kicking off during the week.

We didn't do this last fall. Last fall, we were winding down outdoor services (*remember those chilly October mornings in the parking lot?*) and heading back into podcasts and lockdowns. There was nothing to kickoff. Our last Homecoming Sunday was in 2019, and we had *no idea* what changes lay around the corner.

Maybe today that is still true. But we are here now. And it is good to be gathered.

Our scripture reading today is a familiar one. Rog returns to this text every year on kickoff Sunday as an invitation to congregational life and an expression of our core values. It seemed like a tradition worth keeping—especially since it's been two years. Especially since so much has changed.

The text is the same, but we're not.

I wonder what caught your attention as I read this passage?

I wonder how it made you feel?

I'm wondering these things for you in part because, in my own reading, I keep getting caught in verse 2. "Make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind."

I read these words and I find myself feeling uneasy and disoriented, like I lost something that I'm not going to get back. It almost feels like grief. I don't know how these words hit five, ten, years ago. But now they kind of feel like a pipe dream.

Be like-minded? Of one mind? This is America in 2021 and I think that ship has sailed...

Whatever could we, would we, all agree upon?

Yes, even in the church.

Maybe this is just Paul's word for the church in Philippi. They didn't have social media, or Fox News or CNN or podcasters and YouTubers and entire worlds of information and reality that we inhabit that

barely overlap with those of our neighbors. For us, like-mindedness just isn't possible. Our plausibility structures are too different.

Throw Covid on top of that and all the ways it's wounded and limited us, and the church is in rough shape.

That's the realist in me.

But there's an idealist in me too that is drawn to imagine. What if? What if we could transcend the fray and be what Paul is describing here?

Because this text is a beautiful depiction of the church, at its best:

- Encouragement
- Being united with Christ.
- Comfort, Love
- Common sharing in the Spirit
- Tenderness, Compassion
- Nothing done out of selfish ambition or vain conceit
- Humility that values others above ourselves
- Looking to the interests of others...

At its best, the church is a tangible, lived expression of the invisible life of the Triune God. Divine self-giving love on display in human form. I want to be a part of a community like that. What a powerful countercultural witness in our world.

And so we keep returning to this text, to remind us what it is to be the church. And to courageously imagine: how might we, as Hope Church, live this out afresh in 2021?

For Paul, this vision of the church is rooted in the gospel, the story of Jesus—"who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage, but made himself nothing... humbling himself to humanity and to death, even death on a cross."

This poem, or hymn, begins with Christ's equality with God—his deity, his glory, his preeminence—and carefully traces his descent. Down into servanthood. Down into humanity, in the incarnation. God man. Down into obedience unto death, and the worst kind of death at that—even death on a cross.

At every step Jesus relinquishes—his status, his control, his dignity, his will, his very life.

This is the self-emptying Christ. The self-offering God.

This is where the church, at its best, finds itself. This is the soil where Paul plants verses 1-4. "In your relationships with one another, have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had."

And if "like-mindedness" feels like too much of a hurdle in verse 2, it's worth noting that our minds show up again in verse 5—as does the idea of sameness.

Except—and this is key—we’re not called to be the same as each other. We’re not called to think the same things as each other. We are called to have the same attitude of mind as Christ. The same willingness to give up what we might otherwise treasure, the same willingness to descend, the same willingness to offer ourselves.

With just as much agency. The verbs in verse 6-8 are all about what Jesus does, not what anyone else takes from him. This is not about being humbled or humiliated or violated by someone else. *Jesus makes himself* nothing, Jesus humbles himself. Jesus chooses obedience. Jesus chooses death by crucifixion.

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave 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 acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Christ relinquishes. So God exalts.
After humiliation, there is honor.

The life of Christ is shaped like a V.

The church is called to follow his pattern. To be the cruciform community. Ours is the self-offering, for the sake of others. God’s is the resurrection, the vindication, the exaltation.

Yesterday, as you know, was the 20th anniversary of September 11. I was struck by the tributes and memories shared. The hero stories.

Like the story of Todd Beamer, who was one of the passengers on Flight 93. A 32-year-old dad, with two little boys at home and a baby on the way. After his plane was hijacked, Todd managed to sneak to a phone in the back and call 911. During the 14 minutes of that call, he gave details about what had happened on his flight—details we otherwise wouldn’t have known—and learned about the other planes that had crashed into the Pentagon and the World Trade Center that morning. By the end of the call, as their flight veered toward Washington DC, Todd and some of his fellow passengers resolved to take down the terrorists in the cockpit. Before they did so, Todd suggested that they pray—the Lord’s Prayer and Psalm 23. *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...”* Familiar words from Todd’s life of faith. The last words the 911 operator heard from Todd were “Let’s roll.”

Flight 93 never made it to DC. It crashed into a field in Pennsylvania, killing all 44 people on board. No one else.

Todd Beamer literally gave his life to save others. Twenty years later, he is still being honored as a hero.

“In your relationships with one another, have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had...”

Maybe, when like-mindedness feels too far afield, we can start here—with our shared belief in the person and work of Christ, our shared affirmation of his V-shaped life. Maybe, amidst all our differences, we need to first see ourselves side by side, on bended knee, together confessing Christ as Lord.

Maybe that’s what Paul is getting at. Maybe we can start there.

We have framed our life together around the themes of **worship, community, education and service**. Each of these core values is rooted in Philippians 2. Each of them has taken a hit during the past 18 months. We've missed seeing an army of kids passing the peace. We've missed the choir, the nursery, and the opportunities—however planned or spontaneous—to *be* together and serve together.

As we kick-off a fuller range of Hope activities, this is what we value. This is who we hope to be:

We value **worship** that intentionally awakens us to the presence of God through the preaching of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments.

We value the shared life of **community** in which we celebrate each other's joys and bear each other's burdens.

We value **education** and nurture that equips and challenges us to be better informed, wiser, biblically-grounded, and trained in the mind of Christ.

We value **service** -- a full engagement in the world as a faithful, tangible response to God's grace.

We are glad for a fuller return to OWLS and GEMS, catechism and cadets, Sunday School and Moms Group, etc. etc. This place has been too quiet over the past 18 months.

But as Philippians 2 reminds us every year, all the trappings of doing church and being the church – all our worship and education and community and service – are nothing if not anchored in the gospel. In the good news of a God who redefines greatness, who stoops to be with us, be *among* us, who manifests glory on the cross, who is risen and ascended and exalted and rightly worshipped by all creatures and the host of heaven, now and in the age to come.

"In humility, value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others." How can we do this for each other this year? Amidst ongoing polarization. Amidst Delta, or mu, or whatever else is coming at us this year (looking at you, Synod '22). How can we, in humility, value others above ourselves? Hold their interests in tension with ours?

This is not a statement siding with anybody on anything. Let's be honest: we all want the people who disagree with us to do a better job of considering our needs, our interests.

But what's clear is the call to humility. The call to choose self-sacrifice over of self-preservation. The communal life of the church—all that we value—comes with shared risks and shared discomforts.

What do you have to offer?

What's keeping you from sharing it? or giving it away?

Part of making space for Rog's recovery over the past couple months has meant sharing this pulpit with a variety of preachers—some members of Hope Church, some friends of this community. Each preacher is free to choose their own text and topic.

I've been struck by the consistency in the messages over the past few weeks.

Three weeks ago, Dave Larsen encouraged us to use our words to bless, not to harm – because everyone that we talk to and talk *about* is made in God’s image, and because Christ died for all.

Two weeks ago, Phil Leo encouraged us to not just talk *about* the gospel, but to *live* the gospel in our everyday lives, dying and rising, choosing self-sacrifice over self-service.

Last week, Aaron Kuecker encouraged us to pray, with thanksgiving, for all people—being mindful that we too are people with whom God has been immensely patient and gracious.

It’s a nice little sermon series—except that everyone was acting independently and it was totally unplanned. I’m inclined to see that less as coincidence, and more as evidence that the Spirit is at work among us. Calling us back to the gospel, calling us into humility before God and others, calling us to be the church.

And I think it’s timely. Because being the church feels fragile in 2021. It’s a broken habit for many of us. Regathering this past year has been a whole bunch of two steps forward, one step back. We’re inching ahead, but we’re tentative and unsure.

But maybe that’s not a bad place to be.

Because fragility begets humility.

We’ve learned a lot over the past 18 months about our limits and our needs. We’ve learned that we need friends. We need family. We need someone to lean on—when we’re sick, when we’re lonely, when we’re burned out and maxed out. We need each other.

And we need habits that ground us shared truth, shared reality, a shared vision of what it means to be human. Habits like Sabbath, and service, and prayer, and speaking aloud the words of scripture together, and giving away a slice of our income—if only to remind us that it was never really ours to begin with.

We need the church—fragile as she may be.

And maybe it is precisely there—in our uncertainty and need and specificity—that the gospel is found among us. Because the church that we need is not some grand universal church out there. We need the church with faces and voices and hands and feet, and quirks and faults and culture and children and grandparents and stories. The church with the people that can bring you a casserole, or give your kid a ride home, or call to check in on you. The local church, however mundane and unimpressive.

For it is precisely there that Jesus, the divine life, is embodied among us. Still choosing self-giving over self-preservation. Still taking up the towel and taking up the cross. Still on the path to glory. Christ, our only hope, our only certainty and our only shot being one in mind and spirit.

A few years ago, at Prairie Hope Companion, Clay Carlson shared an original song he wrote about Hope Church.

I remember standing in the back, and I couldn’t stop the tears. Moe and I were between churches at the time, and we longed for a local congregation to call home. We’d been hurt by the church before and we felt like misfits everywhere we went.

It was easy to belong to Jesus. It was hard to belong to a specific group of his-followers.

Maybe you know the feeling.

I hope you know you're welcome here. Quirks and faults and all... the gospel is among us.

I'll let Clay sing us out.