

November 17, 2024

Philippians 2:1-8

“Have This Mind Among Yourselves!”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
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Decatur, Illinois 62526

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In 3 John 7 we are told about those who were sent to proclaim the gospel. As they went from place to place they did not accept anything from unbelievers. They expected that any support that they would receive would come from the sacrifice of those who had been truly touched by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. They did not expect that any unbeliever should be asked to support the things of the church. Everything was to rest upon the shoulders of God's people and their love for Christ.

As to what the people of God owe their pastors, the apostle Paul writes: "The Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel (1 Cor. 9:14)." And in another place the writer to the Hebrews (13:17) admonishes the flock: "Obey your leaders [insofar as they are preaching and teaching the Word]. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you."

As to the place of worship, and all that goes with it, do you remember Nympha? Probably not. She lived in Laodicea (Col. 4:15) and provided her house (which must have been of considerable size) for the meetings of the church there. I am also reminded of what we read in Exodus 35:4-9 regarding the construction of the tabernacle in the wilderness and the contributions of the people:

Moses said to all the congregation of the people of Israel, "This is the thing that the Lord has commanded. Take from among you a contribution to the Lord. Whoever is of a generous heart, let him bring the Lord's contribution: gold, silver, and bronze; blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen; goats' hair, tanned rams' skins, and goatskins; acacia wood, oil for the light, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, and onyx stones and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece ..."

In the New Testament (2 Cor. 9:7- 8) we have something similar to what we just read from Exodus, "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work ..." We could go on. So, what's the point? It's those who have been touched by the good news of Jesus and the forgiveness of sins who support the preaching of the gospel and the administration of sacraments in the world - all that flows to them and all that flows from them. Even in private life - in their vocations - the people of God themselves are proclaiming "the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light," as it says in 1 Peter 2:9.

Some years ago there was an Asian Lutheran church that, when it came time to collect the offerings, they would tell their visitors that they were not to give money to the church. They would say the following in their service:

This is a privilege, a spiritual and holy ritual for those who believe in their Lord Jesus Christ and are baptized. This is their opportunity to respond to God's love and grace. It is their opportunity to fulfill their loving obligation as the children of God as they return part of the

money they have received from God to build the church and reach out to the world. Again, those who are not Christians are not permitted to contribute to this offering.”

We often say something similar to that here at Pilgrim during our stewardship Sundays. In fact, all year we don't even collect during the service so that our visitors will not feel pressure to give and conclude that the church is only about asking people for money. It is the hope and prayer of the pastors that God's people will always take care of the church in all ways without us ever having to beg. Here we aren't just talking about financial support, but also in the sacrifice of oneself in taking the time to simply be here and bring their children and grandchildren and use their talents to keep things going. It's our hope and prayer that our people will also witness and invite people to Pilgrim, even though it may jeopardize relationships.

In good times and tough times the Lord has blessed us mightily over the years in every way. For that we give thanks to the Lord and are all the more strengthened in our trust in him. The gift of God's love for us in his one and only Son, and the hope of being with him forever in heaven, and our love for those who are lost have been a powerful motivation, even though we have struggled with complacency and have failed from time to time. Thanks be to God there is forgiveness in Christ and power to move forward.

While we humanly see how things have been changing in our culture we can see the possibility of tough times ahead, but only God knows. But we trust that whatever God sends our way will always be his saving will. We also are mindful of what Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 8 regarding the churches in Macedonia: “in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord ...” May God spare us from laziness and complacency and excuses. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us.

As Christians, who have been so loved by God through his one and only Son at the cross and empty tomb, we still find ourselves living in this unbelieving world. And we learn from John 14:30 that Satan is “the ruler of this world.” But we do know that Satan's rule is limited by God and certainly broken by the victory of Jesus, who is the atoning sacrifice for our sins and the hope of all that is to come. As a people who have been so loved by God and saved from death and hell, we realize that this forgiveness makes its way through every aspect of our lives. As we live in Jesus' death and resurrection, we have learned the secret of being content as his love for us permeates our lives in every circumstance - when we are brought low and when we abound, in plenty and in hunger, abundance and in need. As Paul writes: “I can do all things through him who strengthens me (Phil. 4:13).”

The love of God has been made manifest to us in Jesus. We live through him. He laid down his life for us and we love because he first loved us. God has served us in every way for our lives. Having been served in such a way, we become servants of him and one another. This character of love and service comes from the love and service of Jesus. His whole life was a life of service to us. He was born to serve and cleanse us. He died to take away death and makes us into a new creation to live with him in a brand new creation that can never perish, spoil, or fade. All this comes to us in the undeserved kindness of Jesus Christ our Savior.

Our Jesus did not need to be coerced, bribed, or prodded into setting aside his place in heaven, his power, and all his rights and privileges, when God called him to become our Suffering Servant. He willingly became one of us and gave up everything. He came to suffer and die on a cross to atone for our sins. He didn't have to create us. He didn't have to save us. Still, he did, and has given himself and all things. Amazing isn't it?! The creator of the universe did everything to serve us that we might have it all! What a wondrous love has been given to us that we may love and serve one another! Thus, we hear the words of Paul in our Epistle lesson for this morning: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Indeed! These realities are to be found in who we are. Having the heart of a loving servant is the very expression of God-given faith. Humble, loving service is a clear mark of Christians stewardship, that is, it is a clear mark of how we manage ourselves and all we have. The attitude of Christ becomes our attitude, even though it isn't perfect in us. One Lutheran preacher once said: "The Christian life, our life as God's stewards, is not something we do because we must, or because by doing so we gain points or favor with God, but rather it's the character of God in us. It's our privilege and honor to be servants, to serve in love."

Yes! Our privilege and honor. To be servants. To love with who we are and all that we have because of the love of Jesus!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott