

Let the Same Mind Be in You
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United Church of Strafford, Vermont
April 2, 2023, Palm Sunday, Passion Sunday and Sixth Sunday in Lent,
Luke 19:29-42; 21:37-23:56

Welcome: Welcome to the United Church of Strafford, Vermont, on this Sixth Sunday in Lent and Palm and Passion Sunday. Welcome to those of you in the sanctuary and those online, and welcome to the Cantornote Church Musicians from Boston and Strafford. We acknowledge that we are on the ancestral and unceded land of the traditional caretakers, the Western Abenaki people. Our congregation has voted to establish a reparations fund for the hardships they have had to endure from colonial times unto this day. We give thanks for the opportunity to share in the bounty of this place and to protect it in the spirit of indigenous wisdom.

We need the mind of Christ to understand the Palm and Passion story fully, and that means opening our hearts as wide as possible. That goes for the service, but it applies afterward as well, when we emerge emotionally drained from what we are about to experience. I hope you will listen with compassion to the scriptures, and I hope you will *act* with compassion as you greet those who have gone on this intense journey with you. Please reach out to one another after the service with care and support, extending yourself especially to those you do not know and those you know are having a hard time, both in the sanctuary and on Zoom.

Call to Worship: This morning we will be following the Passion story in the gospel of Luke. The word Passion comes from a Latin root meaning to suffer; compassion means to suffer with. The Passion story describes Jesus' suffering in his final days, and our task today is to suffer with him. Holy Week was a journey of ordeal for Jesus and his disciples. It should be an ordeal for us, too. The most important thing we can do in this service is to be completely present, as if we have never heard the story before, and feel our way, more than think our way, through it.

Let the Same Mind Be in You

Our heart aches if we allow this passion story and the pain of our world today into our consciousness. Shock, horror and grief that they could do this to Jesus. Outrage at the injustice

and the cruelty, the hard-hearted capacity to kill. Discouragement at the thought that this is still happening, that authoritarian rulers invade nations and state laws have been passed in the last month that will lead innocent, loving people to violent deaths.

We want a way out of escalating violence against humanity and the earth, we want to help the Spirit that filled Jesus which is the same Spirit that is filling us with anguish at how things are, we want to help it fulfill the ideal that we know as the realm of God on earth, an ideal we know is possible because we live it in our homes and communities much of the time, following the Golden Rule, extending compassion and lovingkindness and inclusion to all.

So what can we do beyond simply feeling our grief or rage or longing? The earliest church answered that question, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”

Letting the same mind be in us does not mean we will all be the same. We have different gifts, interests and situations in life, and different forces have shaped us.

But there are some characteristics of the mind of Christ that we can see in the Passion Story that are common to us all.

One is self-emptying. Paul said, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who...emptied himself...” Emptying ourselves is not a one-time event. Jesus was as empty of self as can be, but had to self-empty again in the Garden of Gethsemane.

We need to do it many times a day if we are trying to cultivate the mind of Christ within us. The voice of our self that we almost always hear is the voice of our ego, our strong identity as a separate individual with a clear idea of what we want and don't want, and a driving ambition to fulfill our self-interest.

Self-emptying allows other voices within us to arise, including the voice of the Spirit of the universe that filled Jesus. That voice has a completely different perspective on who we are. It sees us as one with all people, creatures and creation. It can love our neighbor as our self, because it sees our neighbor actually is our self. It enables us to be extraordinarily generous and altruistic. The Spirit's voice within us leads us to risk standing up for people whom others are attacking, laying down our life even for strangers or enemies.

Another thing about having the same mind as Christ is related to self-emptying, and that is nonviolence. Nonviolence asks that we be far more vulnerable and courageous than our ego

wants to be. Nonviolence means confronting evil aggressively, but doing so in a way that transforms enemies into friends and builds oneness and willingly accepts physical suffering for ourselves while refusing to inflict physical suffering on others.

The natural ego of Jesus wanted to escape suffering on his last night, but through self-emptying he was able to follow the Spirit and perform the final step of his nonviolent resistance. We cannot know what the mind of Christ was thinking, but we do know that his nonviolent self-sacrifice was the single most impactful action in human history, far more than any war.

We cannot know what actions we will be called to take, but we do know that the power of the Spirit will flow through our self-emptying and nonviolence.

A crucial third thing that all minds like Christ share is the cause they serve, and that is revolutionary love, to borrow a phrase from contemporary civil rights leader, Valerie Kaur.

There is something misleading in the Gospel story we heard today. It says that Jesus was crucified with two criminals. They may have broken laws, but they were on the cross because they were revolutionaries.

The cross was the most brutal form of torture Rome had devised. Its slow, excruciating death was reserved for those who threatened revolution, and the public display of people being tortured on the cross served as a warning not to challenge Rome. Jesus, like John the Baptist before him, proclaimed the coming of a kingdom that would overthrow all existing empires. The people lining the streets on Palm Sunday expected the Messiah to lead a violent uprising.

The movement Jesus led, though, was for the cause and realm of revolutionary love, a society that called on its citizens to self-empty and practice nonviolence and place the love of God and others ahead of the love of our individual being or nation.

Jesus weeps as he looks out over Jerusalem at the end of Palm Sunday, saying, “If you had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But you are blind to them.” The things that make for peace are all about love, and until that revolution of love takes place, the deadly violence against people and the earth will continue.

We need to let ourselves grieve. We need to let ourselves long to have the Spirit-filled mind of Christ that can see the way through the hell humans are making to an evolutionary leap

forward, a cultural resurrection into a new humanity living in harmony as a blessing to all people and all creation.

The key to all this—to self-emptying and the capacity for nonviolence and revolutionary love—is, of course, prayer, especially centering prayer or meditation. Gandhi had the mind of Christ as much as anyone ever has. He said that his greatest weapon was silent prayer, and it was as true in his nonviolent struggle as in his effort to self-empty.

Let us go into our hearts now and self-empty to allow the mind of Christ to rise in us and lead us toward the contribution we can make to a new world, a Spirit-led path through grief to hope. Let us pray in silence...

Haiku by Mel Goertz:

The chickadees have made it
through winter. Snow, ice
and sunflower seed.