



Calvary Presbyterian Church
Sunday, October 1, 2023

"We Are There"
WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY
Rev. Eyde Mabanglo

Are we there yet?

- My child asks, "Are we there yet?" While putting on her shoes.
- I told my child that I'd give her \$10 if she didn't ask, "Are we there yet?" And that she had to pay me a dollar if she does...She owes me \$276 dollars.
- One Dad answers, "Yes." Then, unlock all the doors and says GET OUT.

Are we there yet?

Have we arrived...what is our destination as life-long followers of Christ today? If you offer up the question as a prayer to Jesus this morning...if you are asking his opinion and authentically wanting an answer, then I suspect Jesus would say you are so there.

Are we there yet? **We are so there!**

"We are There" is one of the themes of World Communion Sunday...

In our living, in our giving...We are There!

Backstory of World Communion Sunday: "The concept spread very slowly at the start. People did not give it a whole lot of thought. It was during the Second World War that the spirit caught hold, because we were trying to hold the world together. World Wide Communion symbolized the effort to hold things together, in a spiritual sense. It emphasized that we are one in the Spirit and the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

Today, World Communion Sunday is celebrated around the world, demonstrating that the church founded on Jesus Christ peacefully shares God-given goods in a

world increasingly destabilized by globalization and global market economies based on greed. (Presbyterian Mission Agency)

I was asked about whether we needed any special “worship arts” for this morning. Some churches hang banners around their sanctuary symbolizing the seven continents that represent our global community. Others have hung flags from all over the world representing all the nations of the earth. Others have prepared bread from various cultures representing the various culinary traditions and flavors enjoyed by those sharing the broken loaf and those drinking from the same cup of blessing today.

I didn’t want to ignore the differences between our various cultures, but I wanted to de-emphasize the borders that keep us separate and apart. This is the delicate dance that we are all called to, as disciples.

Our passage today is Paul’s letter to the Philippians and is a response to divisions in the church - essentially borders that are separating members of the faith community. In the church, there can be numerous versions of us/them polarities...male/female, young/old, left/right, belong/don’t belong. These are indeed borders that keep God’s beloved apart.

We are given a course correction in Romans 8:38-39 (NRSV, UE):

³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

As you hear today’s Scripture reading, consider how we learn about ourselves through our relationships with others without requiring some version of sameness from those who are different from us? And how do we have the mind of Christ as try to be the Body of Christ?

NEW TESTAMENT READING/Philippians 2:1-13/NRSVUE

Imitating Christ’s Humility

2If, then, there is any comfort in Christ, any consolation from love, any partnership in the Spirit, any tender affection and sympathy, ²make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³Do nothing from selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others. ⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

⁶who, though he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, ⁷but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, assuming human likeness. And being found in appearance as a human, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

⁹Therefore God exalted him even more highly and gave him the name that is above every other name, ¹⁰so that at the name given to Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Shining as Lights in the World

¹²Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence but much more now in my absence, work on your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

SERMON

"An anthropologist studying the habits and customs of an African tribe found himself surrounded by children most days. So, he decided to play a little game with them. He managed to get fresh fruit from the nearest town and put it all in a decorated basket at the foot of a tree.

Then he called the children and suggested they play the game. When the anthropologist said "now", the children had to run to the tree and **the first one to get there** could have all the fruit to him/herself.

So, the children all lined up waiting for the signal. When the anthropologist said "now", all the children took each other by the hand and ran together towards the tree. They all arrived at the same time divided up the fresh fruit, sat down and began to happily munch away.

The anthropologist went over to them and asked why they had all run together when any one of them could have had the food all to themselves.

The children responded: "Ubuntu. How could anyone of us be happy if all the others were sad?"

Ubuntu is a philosophy of some African tribes that can be summed up as "I am what I am because of who we all are."

In 2008, Bishop Desmond Tutu gave this explanation of “ubuntu” . . . “One of the sayings in our country is “Ubuntu”, the essence of being human. Ubuntu speaks particularly about the fact that you can’t exist as a human being in isolation. It speaks about our inter-connection. You can’t be human all by yourself, and when you have this quality – Ubuntu – you are known for your generosity. We think of ourselves far too frequently as just individuals, separated from one another, whereas you are connected and what you do affects the whole world. When you do well, it spreads out; it is for the whole of humanity.”

In today’s Scripture passage, Paul writes about the mutuality and inter-connectedness of the body of Christ, our faith communities, and our relationship with others. If “I am because we are”...then “I cannot be unless we are.”

It is a **pattern of thought** that would serve the church well today. That is what Paul is writing about when he speaks of the “mind” of Christ. The word is PHRONEO in the Greek, and Paul repeats this phrase through these verses—Be of the same love, the same mind, the same WAY of thinking as Christ. It is **Christ’s pattern of thinking**...it is THE WAY...this is how we are to be the body of Christ, each member, each individual honoring how we are part of a collective whole and that we are on a saving path together. In our communion service today, we take the bread individually symbolizing our personal responsibility to honor THE WAY of CHRIST and we take the cup together symbolizing our unity in Christ.

I have been on a journey my whole life, my whole Christian life, to get to know the mind of Christ, the way of Christ. As a twin I certainly had to wrestle since birth how much of my identity was dependent on my being part of a WE and what part of how to simply be ME. This is the tension with all of us as we want to be distinct yet belong to a greater community, a larger family, the body of Christ, the world.

I just read an article about “nametags” for churches. Some people love them, and some people hate them (just one more polarity for pastors to address in their congregational care). The article explained how people liked the colorful and disposable nametags that you might find at a birthday party. A polished custom name badge can show that someone is a long-established member of a church and a new sticky badge broadcasts loud and clear that someone is a visitor. There is already a border in our midst...those who belong and those who aren’t sure if they belong. But if everyone got a new name tag, then we remove the border and celebrate the communion, the community in that moment.

Maybe an embossed custom nametag represents the power of belonging to a church community, and the disposable nametag represents the challenges for those coming into a new environment. Members of a church give up that power for the sake of the other when they are willing to just use the same nametags a visitor would. It's like giving up a preference for the organ and allowing a guitar to accompany our members singing together (or giving up the guitars, so that we can hear the organ). It's like giving up a good parking spot for our friends with mobility issues and walking a few extra steps to attend worship. It is like allowing a child to babble and coo in her mother's arms, then wishing they would go to the basement to be heard no more.

Having the mind of Christ means seeing differences and valuing differences. Having the love of Christ means taking away the borders that those differences have erroneously put in our minds and transcending them. We erase borders by using any privilege or power that we might enjoy as being part of a dominant culture and valuing differences—we don't ignore differences, we value them and see how they make us better Christians, frankly better people. We do this by practicing the mind of Christ that says, "I am, because we are".

Calvary, the power to give up power is The Way of Christ and it is no more pronounced than on the Cross at Calvary. The cross is itself a moral pattern. The cross represents the injustice that surrounds us. And it was on the cross that Jesus chose "Downward Mobility" in order to showcase the way of God—PHRONEO, the thinking of God...the mind of Christ.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
⁶who, though he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, ⁷but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, assuming human likeness. And being found in appearance as a human, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

PHRONEO, the pattern of Christ's thinking is the pattern of the Cross.

And after we learn this from Christ that it is all about the power to give up power, then we see that God places him as Lord above all Lords....

And we are to see the thinking of God as the WAY above all WAYS...

Can we trust this way of being? Can we trust this kind of love, this kind of thinking? As we have been learning about the Spirit during our Season of

Stewardship, we are learning to trust the Mind of Christ which is the Heart of God which is the Wisdom of the Spirit.

Just as Peter stepped out of the boat to walk to Jesus, we can trust without borders (reference to lyrics from the choir anthem this morning)...We do not need to limit ourselves, our love, our thinking, but to instead step up, step out, and step over the borders between us and our human siblings.

As some say: **When we draw a line in the sand, we will always find Jesus on the other side!** Always.

Understanding the mind of Christ is understanding power—namely that there is a sacred difference between power over and power with...

Power over is a relationship of polarity, opposite views and differentials in power forever attracting each other from a posture of suspicion if not downright contempt. Power with is at once relational and collective. (Based on works by Mary Parker Follett)

As we focus on unity on this World Communion Sunday, let us erase the borders of dominance and instead value the differences of culture. Let us step over the borders with Jesus and learn from our neighbors to the degree that God is love. We aren't always the ones at the center of everything, dominating the conversation...we are not always the one needing to teach and guide and direct and have power over...the mind of Christ says, use the power of my Spirit to give up your power and learn from my beloved children, your siblings, about how high and wide and long and deep is my love for this whole world.

Have we arrived at our destination? Even if you feel that you haven't quite arrived at understanding the mind of Christ, I hope that you will accept that you have certainly arrived at an opportunity to explore it more.

For God so loved the world...and God so loves you!

Calvary, are we there yet?
We are so there.

May it be so,

