

*Re-membered into new life*  
*Philippians 2:1-13*

Last week we read the opening of Paul's letter to the Philippians, noting how grace-filled and generous and spacious his words are, considering how constantly Paul must have been listening for the voice of the Resurrected Jesus speaking grace and "Peace" to him. And that this gracious letter is only possible because Paul keeps placing himself in the presence of the Resurrected Victim, so that he is always in the presence of grace and "Peace." So that whatever he says and does is in partnership with the Spirit of the Living, Resurrecting, Loving, Gracious God.

The letter continues. But in the part of the letter we hear read today, Paul is saying some hard things. Grounded in the grace and peace of his opening words, today's words challenge the Philippian fellowship...and us. They invite us...they *ask* us to open ourselves in new ways. Not just open ourselves, but to empty ourselves.

<sup>5</sup> Let [the] mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,  
<sup>6</sup>     who, though he was in the form of God,  
      did not regard equality with God  
      as something to be *taken by force*,  
<sup>7</sup>     but emptied himself,  
      taking the form of a [servant],  
      being born in human likeness.

Paul's ask...his request of us is really quite astounding. "Let the mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.... Let the mind that was in Christ Jesus be in you." He is assuming...expecting...asking us to participate in a profound conversion: that our minds—our ways of thinking and understanding, our attitudes, our mindsets—that our minds be transformed to mirror the mind of the Resurrected Christ. Intellectually, we know this conversion is possible. But we don't know this in our bodies and beings or in our practices and daily living. Many of us have been formed to think that Jesus is a unique and particular

kind of human being. And that we can't to be like him...we shouldn't even expect to be like him. And so we don't. We don't expect ourselves to be like Jesus. We excuse our smallness and pettiness by saying, "We're not Jesus." We offer excuses for our habitual failure to be a resurrection people.

And it's true. We're not Jesus. Yet each of us is created in the image of God, our Parent. We are created to be our own particular expression of being human. And in our particular humanity, Paul is asking...he's pleading with the Philippian fellowship...and Fellowship of Hope...to let our minds—our thinking, our habits and practices, our *habitus*—to be formed and transformed. So that we *have the same* thinking, the same understanding, the same habits and practices that Jesus did.

I wonder if, at some level, we think Jesus will be diminished if we have the same mind as Jesus. If that's an unconscious fear we carry, Paul is begging us to let it go. The Resurrected Jesus will not be diminished by our imitation. Rather, the Resurrected Christ is magnified when our minds are formed and transformed until we share the mind of Christ. Having the same mind as Christ—having the same habits and practices, the same attitudes and thinking—is a conversion that, as people of the resurrection, we *can* expect, that we *can* give ourselves to, that we *can* practice and participate in.

So Paul is asking the Philippians...and us...to have the same thinking and attitudes and practices as Jesus has. That's the invitation. The good news. Then comes the hard news: emptying ourselves. The mind of Christ...the habits and practices of Jesus the Christ...are habits and practices and ways of thinking that made it possible for him to become God's Word-made-flesh, to become human, to become a servant and wash the feet of his disciples, to serve his fellow human beings.

We are so steeped in a mindset of accumulation and exploitation that we can hardly imagine an emptying mindset. We live in a country and on a land that was stolen, land that was taken by force and exploited. Not only the land, but the human beings that lived here...taken...plundered. We live in a country and in an economy that has been built on top of taking, stealing, forcing, enslaving. Force and coercion and exploitation are so woven into the fabric of our society that we barely notice it. We don't see how these threads of force and exploitation are woven into us, into our relationships, into our ways of thinking, into our habits. Yes, I mean woven into me, into you and me.

But the mind of Christ, the mindset of Christ is a radical contrast. Rather than stealing, Christ's hands are open, offering and giving. Rather than climbing the ladder of domination and hierarchy, Christ walks with humility, stooping and serving. Rather than being at the center and controlling, Christ seeks the margins. Rather than accumulating and holding, Christ releases. Rather than forcing, Christ submits. Over and over, again and again, we see the mindset of emptying—the thinking and habits and practices—of emptying. In the wilderness, when tempted by the accumulation of power and position, Jesus chose emptiness.

The emptiness of being loved and beloved.

The emptiness of his deeper and deepest self.

The emptiness that allowed him to be present, here and now.

The emptiness that allowed him to see...really see...every body he encountered.

The emptiness that gave him eyes to see every human as loved, as a beloved child of God.

Over and over, as we watch Jesus, he offers...he invites those he encounters to a mindset of release...of forgiveness...of letting go...of emptying. There are any number of stories we could tell, but several are particularly poignant when we look through the lens of *emptying*. The first is the encounter with the rich ruler. In his young life, he had accumulated much. And when he asked Jesus what else he needed to do, Jesus said, “Empty yourself. Get rid of everything you’ve accumulated.” And the man could not. He could not empty himself. He could not release what he had accumulated. He could not let go of his impressive descriptive self. He was unable to let go of his money, his power, his goodness, his good reputation, his exemplary righteousness. He could not empty himself...and he went away sad...knowing that he was missing the glory and grace and peace and love and belovedness that he saw in the person of Jesus. And that he so wanted for himself.

The second story is Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus’ encounter with Jesus was also profound...but ended very differently. The way the story is told, we have the impression that his conversion was as instantaneous and dramatic as Paul’s was. Like Paul, Zacchaeus’ mindset was completely transformed. He went from a mindset of stealing and exploitation in order to climb the ladder of power and prestige...to a mindset of emptying. A mindset of being loved and beloved. A mindset of loving others as he now knew himself loved and beloved. A mindset of repair. With the mindset of Christ in him, he could release his power and position, he could let go of his place in the social hierarchy, he could empty himself of the identity he had accumulated. And with the emptiness mindset, he was so full of love and joy and generosity that it overflowed into the community around him.

We also need to see that in some encounters, Jesus didn’t ask the person to empty themselves...he didn’t ask because they were already empty. The woman who touched the hem of his coat...Jesus didn’t ask her to empty herself—she was already empty. She had no

power or position. Her sense of self, her descriptive self, had been erased over 12 long years of being unseen, of being on the margins, of being in pain. She was so empty that she couldn't remember that she was loved and beloved. So when she encountered Jesus...because Jesus had emptied himself so that he could be full of love and grace and peace and healing...when she encountered Jesus, all of that love and grace and peace and healing washed over her and into her. And her emptiness was filled as she remembered her own belovedness and belonging.

Emptying ourselves isn't about being diminished or punished. Rather, having the mindset of Christ, a mindset of emptying ourselves, is about being magnified and glorified with Jesus, the Christ. A mindset of emptying makes it possible for us to live as resurrection people and communities. When we empty ourselves, it's like cleaning out a closet, getting rid of all the things that we've been accumulating and holding onto over the years. And when we release them, when we stop holding onto our stuff—our physical and material stuff, our emotional and spiritual and moral stuff—when we stop holding onto what we've accumulated, we find ourselves empty.

Empty to be filled with God's love and grace.

Empty to be filled with God's mercy and peace.

Empty to be filled with God's generosity and forgiveness.

Empty to be filled with God's creativity and aliveness.

When we empty ourselves, when our minds have been converted and we have the same mindset as the Resurrected Christ, we have an emptiness and an opening to see ourselves and all others as God's beloved. When we have the same mindset as the Resurrected Jesus, we find ourselves in a space, with an openness to see each other as ourselves, as part of one humanity, sharing the same humanity.

This is God's work in us. We cannot transform ourselves. It is the Resurrected Jesus who finds us...who reaches out with scarred hands...and invites us to let ourselves be found...and emptied...so that we can be raised up into the fulness of God's life and love...raised up into the fulness of belonging and healing...into the fulness of grace and peace.

May we take the hand of the Resurrected One.

May we let ourselves be emptied so that we have the same mindset as Christ.

May we be filled with resurrecting aliveness.

May it be so.