

“Jesus, Others, Yourself”—Philippians 2:1-3

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Jesus, Others, Yourself”, is Philippians 2:1-3 → *If there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

How can you tell if someone is happy? One might think an obvious give-away is the expression on your face. If the measurement of happiness is a smile or laughing you should see it from my perspective right now. However, our context right now doesn't call for laughing or necessarily smiling because we're here in the midst of our spiritual battles to receive, as verse 1 of our text says, *encouragement in Christ . . . comfort from love . . . participation in the Spirit . . . affection and sympathy* or compassion (i.e. walking with others in their sufferings).

I've heard and seen the acrostic of JOY expressed this way: Jesus, Others, Yourself. The concept is that you will experience joy in your life as you put Jesus first and others above yourself. It seems to even be

reinforced in our text where we are instructed to *count others more significant than* ourselves. It has been used to encourage Christians to serve Jesus by helping others, implying that your service will be a pleasurable or satisfying experience. This is far from the perspective of the apostle Paul as he wrote this letter while sitting in prison for preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, a situation which was far from enjoyable and happiness producing.

As Paul wrote to the church in the city of Philippi he talked about joy rather than being happy as a result of your circumstances. In fact, throughout this letter he mentions rejoicing or joy fourteen times, all referring to a joy which you have despite and in the midst of your circumstances. It's what he refers to as a joy *in the Lord* (cf. Philippians 4:4).

In verse 3 of our text Paul says how the Philippian Christians could make his joy . . . *complete—by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind*. Really? That's quite a tall order for a group of sinners working together in a congregation. How could he tell a group of people of various personalities and preferences, gifted in so many different ways, to be *of the same mind*. I've been told many times by members of congregations that unity in the congregation is impossible since you cannot get two people to think alike, let alone be *in full accord and of one mind*.

Such unity is not an impossibility when the Christians in that

congregation function under *the same love*. This *love* of which he speaks is very specific. While English has only one word for *love* the Greek language has three words, each describing different aspects of relationship. The Greek word “phileo” is used to describe a familial relationship (i.e. love between family members) or a friendship (i.e. where one is “like family”). It is this kind of love to which people refer when they feel welcomed by friendly people at church on Sunday.

The Greek word “eros” is used to describe the love which God says is to be shared within the context of marriage between a man and a woman physically. It is expressed physically by a lifelong companionship in community with others on the basis of legal covenants. The civil marriage license is an agreement by all in the community to recognize and respect such an expression of love between them.

In our text Paul uses the Greek word “agape” when referring to *having the same love* from which Christians draw *comfort*. This type of love is completely different in that it is **totally** selfless and self-sacrificing. The other two types of love relationships have built-in expectations for being fulfilled, happy and content, with the hope of giving purpose and meaning to your life. They are based upon a reciprocal relationship where mutual love is a given. “Agape” love is expressed in a much different way.

Agape intentionally strives to display love to those who hate you as

expressed by Jesus' command to *love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you* (cf. Matthew 5:44). Agape distinguishes you from the rest of the world where reciprocal love and acts of kindness are expected. The distinction is refusing to be provoked to anger and, instead of retaliating, you *do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also* (cf. Matthew 5:39). It is unique in that you are *not . . . overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good* (cf. Romans 12:21). It is characterized by loving those who are unlovable and having joy in the midst of the struggles to do so.

God's command in verse 3 of our text describes agape: *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves*. Agape love is the expression of grace—undeserved love and favor. It is bound up *in humility*. Humility is that quality by which we are willing to let go of ourselves, our own interests and the things that we want in a given moment to make the needs and concerns of another person a priority. Humility is necessary for expressing agape love.

In fact, it is so necessary that Paul goes on in this chapter to describe the ultimate expression of agape love in Jesus, the Christ. Philippians 2:6-8 says that though Jesus *was in the form of God, He 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. Even though He was God in the flesh He chose to humble Himself, submitting Himself to His Father's love for rebellious, stubborn, self-centered, arrogant, conceited sinners, lost in a world of self-indulging lust. He willingly died on the cross to experience your punishment of eternal separation from the Father in hell so you could experience the Father's love eternally.

This agape love of your heavenly Father for you can only be experienced as His Holy Spirit brings you to confession of your sins in His presence and lifts you up in His grace and forgiveness to declare, "Thank You Jesus! Thank You for Your love and forgiveness in my life!" It is accompanied by your confession that Jesus is Lord (cf. Philippians 2:11). It recognizes that the spiritual battles and struggles with the presence of sin in your life continue day by day this side of heaven. However, even though you're not always happy in this struggle, Jesus's promise from John 15:11 is yours: *These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*

Thus, the fullness of your joy is not experienced in your service to others. The desire to serve Jesus by serving your neighbor may even create much more suffering for you as you strive to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ in that service. Still, the Holy Spirit moves you into serving others. Not only was Paul in prison while writing this letter but he also

spoke about some who proclaimed *Christ out of selfish ambition . . . thinking to afflict him in his imprisonment*. Even then he rejoiced when Christ was proclaimed no matter what the motive of the individual (cf. Philippians 1:17-18). He rejoiced in such circumstances because such joy is a joy ***in the Lord Jesus***. Since He is Lord His Holy Spirit creates saving faith through the Gospel proclaimed by sinners. Thus, a joy *in the Lord* is created by the Holy Spirit working through the means of grace.

The joy which comes from trusting Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins with the desire to bring that forgiveness into the lives of others as you humble yourself, is Christ's joy. Hebrews 12:2 says we do this *looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, Who **for the joy that was set before Him** endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God*. Not only have you come to know that you are *the joy . . . set before Jesus* but you now see others as *the joy . . . set before Him* as well. They may be other Christians with whom you share a *participation* or fellowship *in the Spirit* in this congregation or they may be others lost in their sin. No matter what the relationships you can bring the joy *in the Lord* to others as expressed in the agape love of Jesus. Amen.

Let's open our hymnals to Psalm 51 and pray together verse 10-13:

Create in me a clean heart, O God,

and renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from Your presence,
and take not Your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.

Then I will teach transgressors Your ways,
and sinners will return to You. Amen.

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