

Sermon

Intro / Hook - Attitude Set-up

As a parent, you try to give your kids good advice. We try to help them navigate the world - to learn how to be healthy and happy, how to be brave and loving and kind... But I'm never really sure what will stick... We don't know that, I suppose until many years later...

My folks were the same way. They did their best with me. :-) And a lot of what they used to tell me *has* stuck. Even if I wasn't always so great a listener at the time... I've been thinking a lot this week about one of my dad's old gems... "Son," he said, "there are a lot of things in life you can't control. A lot of things that happen *to* you. But there are 3 things," he said... [*holding up the number*] "There are 3 things you can choose that really make a difference. 3 things that you can choose that will lead you into a life of joy and peace - no matter what happens.

"Number 1," he said, "is your attitude..."

Series Recap

What does it mean to love the Lord with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength? Over the past few weeks we've explored loving God with our bodies - a part of creation, strong and good. We looked at our souls - our *nephesh* - our very selves, loving God - longing for God. But this week we look at the heart - or as we talked about earlier with the children, what it means to love God with our minds...

Stereotypes

There's a stereotype out there in the world sometimes that loving God with our minds is almost an oxymoron. We put our faith and our intellect into conflict - and we imagine that either

- We need to somehow turn our brains off in order to be truly faithful...
- Or else we imagine that our intellect is the only true way of knowing the world, and whatever faith is, we consign it to the cracks...

The reality is though that the two are not in conflict. Our faith and our minds live well together - our minds acknowledging deep truths of faith and love, even as our faith seeks understanding. A vibrant faith includes our whole selves - body, soul, *and mind*.

Back to the Scripture...

Our scripture this morning comes from Paul's letter to the Philippians. It's a good church - one that - according to the book of Acts - began with a group of women down by the river. The church has been persecuted but remained faithful. Still, Paul has heard of some conflict within the community...

He writes: "If, then, there is any comfort in Christ (which there is), any consolation from love, any partnership in the Spirit... [then] be of the same mind, having the same love..."

Paul calls for them to "be of the same mind." What's fascinating though - is that he's not necessarily telling them they have to agree. For Paul, the solution to this division within the church is single-mindedness. But this isn't unity by conformity - everybody thinking the same thing - holding to the same tenets of faith. No - Paul points to Jesus...

"Be of the same mind, having the same love... Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus..."

For Paul - being like minded means striving to be like Jesus. And Jesus - humbled himself.

The Christ Hymn

Many scholars believe that what follows next is a hymn sung by the early church:

Christ Jesus - who... existed in the form of God,
and did not regard equality with God
as something to be grasped,

I love this: being like God wasn't something Jesus had to strive for - it was in him... And yet he humbled himself...

"Being found in human likeness..."
Like one of us.

There's a theologian named Karl Barth who said - I'm paraphrasing here - "This is what it means for Jesus to be fully divine and fully human: Do you want to know what God is like? Look at Jesus. Full of love and compassion. Ah - but if you want to know what it means to be fully human - to be a human being full of life as we were created to be? Look at Jesus. That is what it means to be human..."

Paul's invitation is to take on the mind of Christ - to take on a different *mindset*. To take on the mind of Jesus - who led not by proving he was the smartest or most powerful person in the room (which he was), but by caring for others - by sacrificing for others...

Mindset

Paul's inviting us into this different mindset - a different attitude. Do nothing from selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others.

No more grasping for power - this is an invitation to lay down the need to be better than... It's an invitation to emptying rather than grasping - to humility.

Maybe we'll find ourselves having fewer debates - where we're trying to win, and everybody just gets more entrenched. Instead we might end up having more discussions, where everybody is seeking to understand together.

Maybe we'll find ourselves willing to sacrifice to make the world a better place - not sacrifice others, but instead willing to give up some of what we have - emptying ourselves.

Maybe we'll find ourselves less angry at "those people out there", and find ourselves curious about them instead .

It's an invitation to joy - to lay down the enemies of gratitude - to let go of resentment of what others have that we do not, to let go of entitlement, the sense that we deserve all that we have...

We can't change what happens to us, but we can see the world through different eyes - with a new attitude, sharing the mind of Christ...

Conclusion - Attitude Reprise

"There are 3 things," my father told me when I was young... "3 things you can choose that really make a difference. 3 things that will lead you into a life of joy and peace, making the world around you better - no matter what happens."

"Number 1, is your attitude.

"Number 2," he said, " is your attitude.

"And number 3 is your attitude."

Take care of those 3 things and you'll do all right...

Amen.