

## **Becoming More Like Jesus**

My mum has Parkinson's. Some of you will know that already. I visited her on Friday evening in Tarbert. She was her usual cheery self – sitting up in her chair, which has held her for quite a number of years now. Her daily challenge is to muster all her strength, and get from the chair to the toilet, with the help of her walker and a carer at her side, which is her daily mountain to climb.

I know that she'll be listening to this later today, as that's what she does on a Sunday afternoon, along with quite a number of other folks who zoom into our weekly service. So, if you are one of those people, catching up with our service today, thanks for worshipping with us and I hope that you feel connected to Cadder Church.

What keeps my mum going through those challenging days of dealing with Parkinson's? What keeps her bright and cheery?

Well, I'm sure she would say her family, especially my sister and brother in Tarbert, but she would also say, my carers.

They are in four times a day, to make sure that she is coping. The majority are young ladies and occasionally a man, go the extra mile. They come into her house singing, laughing and even dancing; they bring cheer and love to my mum. They go the extra mile, washing far more than her feet. They get my mum ready to face another day, they do her hairdressing and put her make up on. That's not on their job description, they don't have to do that but they know how important these things are to my mum.

I think of my mum as a younger and fitter woman, trained to be nurse, establishing a flourishing business, raising four children, playing bowls at the Scottish Championships at Ayr, and now she has become totally dependent upon many young girls, who are younger than her granddaughters.

But young ladies who have become her rock. The family cannot speak highly enough of those young ladies, and a few older ones, who show the best possible care, and who are focused totally on the needs of my mum and she is just one amongst many, that they will visit on a daily basis, and I know she will get a few of them to sit down for a few moments and listen to the sermon today because they know that it is important to her.

Today our service is about thinking about the needs of others. Last week we thought about gratitude, today is thinking about others.

C.S. Lewis, was an outstanding academic, who converted later in life from atheism to theism – a belief in God, that’s quite a shift from someone who was definite about his atheism.

Theism led him to faith in Christ. He wrote many classic books, one of them was *Mere Christianity*. In this book, he writes about how we as sinful believers can be more like Jesus, amid the give and take of everyday life.

How can this be achieved? Lewis writes, it may be helpful for us to pretend to be like Jesus, just as a child might pretend to be a soldier or shopkeeper; so, the game of pretending to be Christ, inevitably reveals to the believer places for improvement and guides the believer towards spiritual maturity.

C.S. Lewis argues that the minute we realise, that we are dressing up like Christ, we will discover ways in which our pretence could become reality. We will be embarrassed to discover thoughts that Christ would not have had, and unfulfilled duties that Christ would not have neglected. Those realisations he says, should in turn prompt us to more complete obedience.

If C.S. Lewis is right, then what does pretending to be like Jesus, look like?

These thoughts connect with what the Apostle Paul's letter to the Church in Philippi, 2v5, “The attitude you should have is the one that Christ Jesus had” or in another Scripture, “Clothe yourselves with Christ” – Rom 13 v14 or “Be imitators of me as I imitate Christ”. 1 Cor 11 v1

The Apostle Paul being the teacher and encourager that he was, writes to instruct the Philippian Church, like all Churches, they had their issues to deal with.

What were these issues?

There were two ladies in this Church who were strong Christians, “they contended at Paul’s side in the cause of the Gospel”. Yet, something has happened that has caused them to be at loggerheads with each other. They are pulling against each other and this disunity is affecting their church. These are strong Christian women but their actions are causing more harm than good, and so Paul writes, “I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntche to be of the same mind in the Lord”. 4v2

What is happening here in Philippi, happens in all Churches. When we take our mind off the Lord, human elements appear, and we give the Devil an opportunity to cause havoc.

So, how does Paul remedy this situation. Well, he cannot visit them, because he is in a prison cell in Rome, because of his faith in Jesus. So he sends a man called Epaphroditus to Philippi, a man who originally came from their congregation, to help Paul, and he gives him this letter to be read out to the Church. This was definitely before emails!

What is the theme of the letter?

He writes in verse 2, "I urge, you, then, to make me completely happy by having the same thoughts, sharing the same love, and being one in soul and mind." V2

I believe that this is the goal of every church, to be of one mind; it's not to have conformity but to have unity. Unity creates community. Unity does not mean that we all have to agree on everything. Unity means, people can have different opinions and different outlooks, but unity in the spirit means that we respect, we reflect, we listen, we speak with grace and speak generously and in Paul's words, we have the same mind in the Lord. That's where our Christian unity begins and ends – having the mind of the Lord. Jesus of course is the Lord.

The Apostle goes on then to give them practical advice as to how they should work together and I'm sure that he has those two ladies in mind – good Christian ladies – who have sacrificed much for the Gospel.

In verse 3, he writes, "Don't do anything from selfish ambition or a cheap desire to boast." For the Apostle, this is where unity begins, that we examine our motives and think about why we do things. Are our motives self-centred, are we feeding our own egos; what were these two ladies doing that harmed the fellowship so much? We don't know but they were obviously self-seeking and not thinking of others.

Paul names them to the congregation, Euodia and Syntyche. In these days, Paul's letter would have been publicly read to the congregation. So, for their names to be read out shows that their disagreement is significant. Basically, Paul is telling them, ladies you need to put the interests of each other first and "in the Lord" to drop your quarrel.

Notice he uses the word plead before both of their names. He is being fair minded and shows equal firmness. The unity and sanctity of the Church was always uppermost in the apostle's mind.

Paul is under no illusion that the two ladies would end their dispute with each other in human reasoning and purely human grounds – thus he adds that their unity, should be in the Lord. So Paul lifts their disunity to a higher level, and tells them that they can be united but it must be in the Lord.

What does it mean to be 'in the Lord'?

Well, it's going back to C.S. Lewis, to clothe ourselves with Jesus...to pretend to be Jesus, really seeking his mind and attitude in everything we do.

Can we pretend to be like Jesus and ask what would Jesus do in these circumstances?

Then Paul writes, look out for each other's interests, not just for your own. How practical is this teaching? What does it look like when we look out for others interests? How does this impact our lives?

Well, we discover this, when we look to Jesus and have his mind.

I want to take you to the upper room and we catch a glimpse of Jesus. It's the night before his crucifixion, you can imagine that he had so much going on in his mind. Yet, he takes time to spend with his disciples and to pass on his final teachings, and to pray with them, and to have the very first communion service. That in itself is the mark of the man we call Jesus and a mark of the Son of God, that he spends time with those closest before he dies.

But before that, he welcomes the disciples into the upper room, to wash their feet. This was the task of the servant. Servants washed feet, not the Lord and Master. But he was demonstrating to them the importance of putting others first. This was no show, he was really demonstrating what life in the Kingdom was to be like when he had left them. They were to serve each other; they were to humble themselves and put the needs of their neighbour before their own.

Friends, that's the lesson that Euodia and Syntche learned, those two strong women in Philippi, who had lost sight of what it meant to be in Christ, as they served their own interests. As Paul pleaded with them, have the mind of Jesus, and that's a message for me, first and foremost, have I the mind of Jesus? For if I haven't this mind, then I have no right to preach to you, and

it's a message for us all this morning, for we all so quickly can take a wrong turn from the path of following Jesus, and suddenly we end up serving our own interests.

But Jesus understands, and he calls us to ask for forgiveness, and to turn around and follow him. When we do, our faith and fellowship with others begins to flourish.

*Have the mind of the Lord*, said Paul. Here is where our faith becomes real, when we allow Jesus to change us. When we allow his Spirit to come into our lives, and begin to show us areas that need his grace.

The goal of a Christian is a longing and desire to be like Jesus. So, we need to look to him, look at his portrait in the Gospels, look at him when he walked this world, how he loved his Father, how he treated other people; study his kindness, compassion, empathy, sensitivity; imitate him, and look at how he reacted to his enemies, and to those who tortured him. Jesus said, in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are those who thirst and hunger for righteousness for they will be filled".

I'm challenging myself this coming week that every morning, when I awake, I will endeavour to literally put on Christ, to imitate Jesus, to walk in his footsteps. Will you join me?

One last thought, my mum's carers are already having the mind of Jesus, in her home. Perhaps, they don't realise it but they are doing it out of love, a compassion that is deep, they see the need of others and they react to that need.

Whatever we do this week, whatever team that we are involved in within the church, from the most menial task, let us do it because we are seeking to have the mind of Jesus, let us do it, with a joy and a spring in our step, let us do it for Jesus, because he wants to see his Church as a place of joy and love and to my mums carers, if you happen to see this service and hear these words, thank you for all that you do and to all carers, thank you for having the mind of Jesus.

Amen.