

“IF YOU COULD READ MY MIND”

Philippians 2:1-11 April 13, 2025

Charles Moore, in his book, "**The Powerful Witness of Community**" tells the story of **Alan**. Charles met Alan 20 years ago when they were both students at Cal Poly. He writes, As a physics major, Alan was both intelligent and articulate. How Alan got on with his studies, however, is still a mystery to me; Alan was virtually blind. He could see well enough to get from one place to another all right, but when it came to reading it was a different story. I can still see Alan, his face two inches away from some text, arduously pecking away at each of his assignments. Alan not only got straight A's, but he later returned to Cal Poly as a physics instructor.

Although Jewish in background, Alan was extremely skeptical of anything religious, especially Christian. He was well read and well versed, and he argued his doubt like a scientist. Alan believed that Christianity was unable to pass the methodological requirements of science. He therefore pled agnostic; there simply wasn't enough evidence to warrant belief in God. As a fledgling freshman, I, along with several others, tried to show him how, in fact, there was ample evidence for Christianity's truth. There were not only the facts of fulfilled prophecy and the reliability of the New Testament documents, but also the testimony of creation. Wasn't that sufficient? Not for Alan.

Alan was usually happy to discuss religious subjects, which always gave us Christians some hope. But even more intriguing was how he liked

to hang out with us. Alan didn't have many friends. He was rather unattractive, much too serious, and totally dependent on others for any kind of transportation. But we tried to reach out to him as best we could. Alan knew he could come with us to the beach or on our recurrent midnight runs to Taco Bell. We tried to include Alan in anything we were doing.

One evening something happened. Though I wasn't there at the time, a bunch of friends had gotten together for a praise night on the beach. Alan came along to enjoy the sunset and roaring bonfire. By the time the evening was over, Alan had made a commitment to follow Jesus. No one had spoken to him, nor did anyone even know. The next day he came to me to tell me what had happened.

"But, Alan," I said, "what made you decide?"

"You see, Chuck," he told me, "It came to me last night, while everyone was singing around the fire, that whenever I am around you Christians, I am happy. Even when we disagree with each other, I find myself liking to be with Christians."

"But, Alan, I thought you were never going to become a believer unless there was first enough evidence."

"Yes, Chuck," he replied, "and I still require it. But that's precisely why I now believe. It's how you all love each other that strikes me most. I never considered that evidence before. A good scientist, you know, considers all the facts. I simply haven't found the love you Christians have for each other anywhere else. That's

evidence enough for me that Jesus is Lord."

I. THE VALUE OF COMMUNITY

Alan discovered the value and power of Christian Community.

We who have grown up in the church might take that gift of community for granted. To belong and to be loved is a powerful witness to Jesus and meets a deep human need. In fact, doctors have discovered that in spite of our technology, **loneliness**, is a significant public health issue, that can have serious mental and physical health consequences, including increased risk of heart disease, depression, anxiety, and even premature death. It's crucial to address and combat loneliness to improve overall well-being.

I find it interesting that even Jesus, during his last week on earth, spends it in community, knowing full well how the week would end. He joins the million some people celebrating Passover. He constantly teaches in the Temple surrounded by others. He spends his last evening with his disciples washing feet, breaking bread, and praying in a garden. Jesus gives them a new commandment to love one another as he loved them, and by this all people would know whose disciples they were. Jesus prays that they would be ONE. Certainly, Jesus valued Christian Community.

The **Apostle Paul** picks up this Community theme and expresses concern for it in every one of his letters. Here in Philippians he writes, **"If then, there is any comfort in Christ, any consolation from love, any partnership in the Spirit, any tender affection and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind."** Paul believed that the church should have a

certain **atmosphere** characterized by joy, love, oneness in mind and unity of Spirit. He knew that without the love and support of the community, Christianity would die out.

He also knew that people, being people, had a difficult time keeping it together. Just look at the multiple divisions that have occurred throughout church history. Doctrinal differences, political influences, personality issues, prejudice, power struggles, past hurts and a whole host of other problems have divided and strained even the best of fellowships. Paul was a traveling church planter and evangelist. He couldn't be present in all his churches, so he had to figure a way to communicate his vision of **Christian Community** and help the people overcome their differences.

II. HOW LOW CAN YOU GO?

You have probably never heard of **Shemika Campbell**. She is a young lady who holds three **Guinness World Records for Limbo**, you know the party game that has people facing forward as they attempt to pass under a low bar without falling or dislodging the bar. With each pass the bar is lowered until there is only one remaining contestant.

Shemika Campbell achieved a record-breaking lowest female limbo-er with a bar just 8.5 inches off the floor, setting the record on September 16, 2010, on the set of "**Live! with Regis and Kelly**" in New York City. Just to put that in perspective, Shemika got under a limbo bar that was the width of a notebook paper.

In Limbo, the lower you go the more you win. That is Paul's principle for living in Christian Community. "**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”.

Go Low! That is not a message most parents tell their children. They may say “**play nice**”, but certainly not “**Come in Last**”. We teach our children to win the trophy, crush the spelling bee, become class president, get the lead role in the school play, make partner at the law firm, be number one. Complete and climb and look to your own interests. That’s how you get ahead in life. Unfortunately, that mind set doesn’t tend to build compassionate and loving communities, and worse, it often can degenerate into selfishness, prejudice, and seeing others as the enemy or someone to use and walk over.

Paul says, “**Go Low Church**”. This doesn’t mean people shouldn’t have any goals or ambitions or not strive for excellence in their endeavors. He is giving us a different goal. Paul is speaking to our **mind set** or outlook. Notice, he mentions the **mind** three times in this pericope. He wants us to have a different view on the world, one that gets us out of the center and sees through the eyes of Christ. The problem is, when we put ourselves at the center then Christ isn’t there. With ourselves at the center we fail at being the church community, and quite frankly, as Christians all together. **Jesus redefines greatness.** “**The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.**” And just to show us how important this mindset is, Jesus lived it out.

III. THE GREAT EXAMPLE

Paul writes, **“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. Who, though he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but 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.”**

Francesco Bernadone grew up in the Middle Ages and was the son of a wealthy merchant. He and his friends were troublemakers into their early 20's. Francesco went off to war, was injured, captured, and spend a year as a POW and convalesced at home. During that time he gave his life to Christ, began to preach the gospel and give money to the poor.

His father **Pietro** was none too happy about Francesco giving away his hard-earned cash. Finally, in an act of desperation, he hauled his son before the local bishop to talk some sense into Francesco. Francesco responded by renouncing all claims to his father's estate and returning all goods, including the clothes off his back, so he stood naked before the bishop. He turned to his father and said, **“Until now I called you my father, but from now on I can say without reserve, ‘Our Father who art in heaven,’ He is all my wealth, and I place all my confidence in him.”** This young man became known as St. Francis of Assisi, founder of the Franciscan Order, none for their compassionate service, brotherly love, and peace.

This is what Jesus did, at an even deeper level. He renounced all claims to his divine nature and inheritance. Jesus deliberately chose to become a vulnerable, weak, poor, human. Jesus chose not to be born into a palace, but as a working-class carpenter. Jesus lived a life of obedience to God. In other words, he made himself to depend on God, just as all of us are. Not only that, but he goes the whole way to self-sacrifice on our behalf. Jesus chose to become a condemned criminal, broken, bleeding, gasping for breath, hanging naked upon a cross. Jesus becomes the lowest form of humanity possible.

Paul wrote, “**Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.**” Faith is not a feeling, but a direction of our **will**. Jesus enters the human predicament by decision of his will. Even though he is the exalted Lord of all, Jesus chose the path of a servant, that he might bless all. This morning we see Jesus ride into the city of his death, on a humble beast. He is being exalted and praised by all the people around him, yet when he chooses to go low, even his own followers abandon him. They missed the fact that his kingdom is not built on domination and forced faith, but one of invitation to service and love. Jesus went low to raise us high.

Even though Jesus has been raised to glory, and one day every knee shall bow, and tongue confess Jesus Christ is Lord, the only path to the Kingdom of God is humility, obedience, and self-sacrifice. As an added blessing, it is also the only path that maintains the healthy fellowship of the church.

Or, as a writer for *Wikipedia* paraphrased Bonhoeffer, "**When the people of God come together to share their lives openly and freely, accepting each other with a kind of unconditional positive regard, there is a sort of social-spiritual 'chemistry' that emerges, and those who come together experience a delightful cohesion and sense of belonging.**"

So, my question this morning Church, is how low are you willing to go? Amen.

First Presbyterian Church in Hawley
Sunday, April 13, 2025
Second Scripture Lesson

Philippians 2:5-11

⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,

⁷but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form,

⁸he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

⁹Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,

¹⁰so that at the name of 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.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be To God.