

When I was a kid, I used to hang out in my father's office a lot. His office was just across the backyard from our house. Because our house was across the backyard from the church where my dad was the pastor. And sometimes after a hard day at middle school, I would go hang around with him and sit in the squishy office chairs and fiddle with the office supplies and look at all his office books. And I would tell him about the tribulations of my middle school life. And my dad probably had better things to do than listen to my tales of middle school drama. But he never made me feel that way. He always set aside the time for me in between his sermon preparation and his pastoral phone calls. He set aside time because he knew how hard it was in that little town where we lived. And that we weren't from there and we would never quite fit in. As the pastor's family, we would never have the privilege of feeling at home. My dad knew that, so he made time for me to talk because he knew what it was like. And I never forgot that. I never forgot how my dad would set everything aside for me.

Maybe you can think of someone like that. Someone who set everything aside for you. You knew they probably had other things they could be doing, projects to complete, schedules to keep, errands to run, people to see, but they stopped and they put all of that aside for you. Maybe it was a parent who stopped to listen. Or a grandfather who took you fishing. Or an aunt who came to your game. Or a friend who drove for hours and hours just to see you. Or a neighbor who came to the funeral, just because. Can you think of a time when someone set aside their own plans and projects just for you?

The apostle Paul tells us that that's exactly what God did for us in Jesus Christ. He set aside everything for us. He set aside his own comfort. He set aside his own power. He set aside what he wanted to do for what we needed him to do. And that's what Jesus did, says the apostle Paul. That was God's mission. And that's our mission too. To be just like that. To have the same mind, and the same attitude as Christ; to set aside our own interests for the interests of others.

Maybe we have experienced that. I bet we have noticed the people who have that same 'setting themselves aside' mindset that Christ had. When

we see people helping with hurricane clean-up in Texas and Florida and Puerto Rico. Or delivering Meals on Wheels. Or caring for foster children. Or teaching English as a Second Language. Or looking after kids or grandkids or parents. People who put others first. We know it's not a Presbyterian Thing. It's a Jesus thing. I saw it at the community dinner on Monday when the members of Midway Christian literally put everyone else first in line for dinner, before the church members themselves. It's not a Midway thing, though. Or even an American Thing. It's a thing done by people who have a certain attitude and a certain understanding that love isn't 'me first'. It isn't me doing only what's in MY best interest. Love means setting myself aside as Jesus set himself aside for me.

For Paul, that's what it means when we have the mind of Christ. That's what it means for us to follow Jesus. Because, remember, Paul says, Jesus had everything. He had heaven in his pocket. He had access to all things divine. He could boss angels around. He could tell the oceans to move from here to there. With a word from on high, he could take down

earthly kings and change history with just a snap of his fingers, without ever having to leave the most comfortable armchair in the universe.

But, Paul says, Jesus set all of that aside. He let it go of that power and privilege. He emptied himself. And the word that Paul uses in Greek is

Kenosis. And it means to be drained, or emptied completely. Like a bottle of soda being poured out. Or a house being completely gutted.

Imagine clearing everything out. All that you hold on to. All hopes and plans and identities and agendas. And being completely emptied.

Completely open and available. Because if you are full of other things, then there is no room for God's things. If you are full of what you want,

then there's no room for what God wants. And Jesus wanted room for

God and room for love. He wanted to MAKE room for us. So he

emptied himself in order that the world might be full, that we might be

full. He gave up power. He gave up fame. He gave up divine honor and

dignity for the life of a nobody, for death on a cross, for the shame and

defeat of the grave. He gave up everything for you and me, so that we

might know love.

That's what Jesus did, Paul tells us. And you, as disciples of Jesus, are to have the SAME MIND he had. And Paul, himself, is writing these words, trying to have the same mind as Christ. See, Paul gave up everything to be a disciple of Jesus. He gave up his family and friends. He gave up his credentials as a Pharisee, a religious professional. He gave up the comforts of his community. And the pleasures of a normal life. To tell people that life didn't have to be the way it was. That life could be so much more. That you have more life when life is not just about you. That you have more love when you give it away. But that message was disruptive. Paul was disruptive to normal life. And so Paul was in prison. And you'd think that this would be a setback for Paul. That prison was a defeat. But no, Paul saw it as an opportunity. A new place where people could hear the story of Jesus. The story of love that doesn't protect itself or keep to itself, but gives itself away. That makes room for you and for me and for all. For this whole world which God will do anything to save.

So, Paul says from prison, don't worry about me. Worry about you.

Worry about being the church; about having the same mind that was in

Christ. So that when others come and wonder about this story, and about who this Jesus is, they will see it. They will experience it and know it in how you set yourselves aside for one another.

So, look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. That's the apostle Paul is telling us as the church, as Jesus' disciples, to have the same mind as Christ. And that means we set aside what is comfortable and familiar as Jesus did. Let's think about what we do every day. How we take the same paths. How we hang out with the same friends. How we find our comfort zone and we stay in it. And we surround ourselves with those who think like us and look like us. But if we have the mind of Christ, we are challenged to set that aside. To make room for new paths and new friends and new experiences; to make room in ourselves so there will be room for God. I recommend going to the Community Dinner at Midway Christian on the last Monday of the month. And going to our potluck today. And sitting down with someone you don't know well. To make time and space for others who may feel there may be no time or space for them.

Having the mind of Christ means setting aside what is comfortable and familiar. And it also means setting aside our pursuit of power and control. All of us in this room, we have some kind of power. OK, so we aren't kings or queens and we can't boss the world around. But we have some power to make choices in our lives. We have some freedoms to say what we want and go where we want and do what we want. And we expect to be in charge of our lives. But then all of a sudden, there are moments when we aren't. There's a catastrophe. A disaster. An illness. A tragedy beyond our control. And we realize how little power we have. And how fragile life is. And that nothing is guaranteed. I heard the story of a friend recently who was involved in a near fatal car accident. She said, you tell yourself that you aren't in control of life, but really you think you are. Until you aren't. And everything changes when all you can do is hope and pray. When all you can do is believe in God's love. What would it mean to live like that? To set aside our hope for control? To set aside our expectations? To just let things be and 'have faith', and trust God? Because we aren't trying to have our own mind. We are trying to have the mind of Christ.

We are to set aside power and control, and comfort and security. And lastly, we are to set aside our preoccupations and our worries, to make room for the worries of others. I'm sure Jesus had a lot of worries when he showed up on earth. I'm sure he had concerns about fixing things for God and doing things for God. And straightening everyone out. And making religion right again. But that concern disappeared over his ministry. The Kingdom of God looked less like a diatribe and more like a conversation with people over bread and fish. It became time talking at a well with a disgraced, lonely woman. It became time with children and with the demon-possessed and with the lepers and with the tax collectors. It became time riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. And wearing a crown of thorns. And being mocked and abused and nailed to a cross. And abandoned by his friends. And by God. For the sake of God's love.

Jesus set aside his concerns and his interests, for the interests of others. In the end, Jesus didn't do anything big. He didn't build a big church. He didn't tell his disciples to look out for themselves. He didn't ask them to be safe and keep God safely behind locked doors. In the end, it's not

about us. It's about God. It's about the love that is bigger and stronger than us. And loves us more than it loves itself. That isn't concerned only about its own concerns and its own life, but the life of the world.

Last Sunday after church, I saw something amazing. I sat on the back porch of our fellowship hall and I listened as some of our youth looked to the interests of others. They shared concerns about friends involved with drugs. Friends who had lost mothers and fathers. Friends in trouble with the law. And that churchy part of me thought, wow, this is not the kind of church I grew up in, where people have it all together and we all feel comfortable and safe and in control. But wow, was it a moment with God. Because for that moment we were all setting aside time to be together. To think and speak and act with the same mind that was in Christ Jesus.

So let us look not to our own interests, but to the interests of others.

Setting aside time, setting aside our plans and our worries to come to this table. With all who want to make room for God in their lives. Who want to set everything aside for the One who set aside everything for us.

Who makes space for us and grace for us here and now. Who emptied himself so that we might be filled with the love of God.