

Change Your Mind  
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First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha  
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**Philippians 2:1-13**

<sup>1</sup> If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, <sup>2</sup> make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. <sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

<sup>5</sup> Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

<sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God,

did not regard equality with God

as something to be exploited,

<sup>7</sup> but emptied himself,

taking the form of a slave,

being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,

<sup>8</sup> he humbled himself

and became obedient to the point of death—

even death on a cross.

<sup>9</sup> Therefore God also highly exalted him

and gave him the name

that is above every name,

<sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus

every knee should bend,

in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

<sup>11</sup> and every tongue should confess

that Jesus Christ is Lord,

to the glory of God the Father.

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; <sup>13</sup> for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

**Matthew 21:23-32**

<sup>23</sup> When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, ‘By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?’

<sup>24</sup> Jesus said to them, ‘I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. <sup>25</sup> Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?’ And they argued with one another, ‘If we say, “From heaven”, he will say to us, “Why then did you not believe him?”’ <sup>26</sup> But if we say, “Of human origin”, we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet.’ <sup>27</sup> So they answered Jesus, ‘We do not know.’ And he said to them, ‘Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

<sup>28</sup> ‘What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, “Son, go and work in the vineyard today.”’ <sup>29</sup> He answered, “I will not”; but later he changed his mind and went. <sup>30</sup> The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, “I go, sir”; but he did not go. <sup>31</sup> Which of the two did the will of his father?’ They said, ‘The first.’ Jesus said to them, ‘Truly I tell you, the tax-collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. <sup>32</sup> For John came to you in the way of

righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax-collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.

Another title for today's message could be "Wrong, wrong, wrong." It doesn't feel good to be wrong, nor to have it pointed out yet it's necessary sometimes. Both readings this morning have people pointing out the errors of others' ways. As the letter to the group in Philippi opens, Paul speaks of how his difficult life in prison is bringing glory to God in Christ's name and concludes, "I am hard pressed between the two: my desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you." After Paul has set up the scene from which he writes, he opens with, "Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel..." One mind. The Philippians are being persecuted by opponents and, it seems, are beginning to unravel in their loyalty to one another through Christ. Difficult circumstances have caused them to begin looking out for themselves, not like Paul who is still looking out for them and for his guards and all those he has met while in prison.

And then we have the chief priests and elders questioning Jesus. Rather than answer them, since they will not admit out loud to the possibility of being wrong about John the Baptist, and equally wrong about Jesus, he gives them a parable in reply. Two brothers are given the chance to do the will of their father – one says he will but doesn't and the other says he won't but changes his mind. The better one is, of course, the latter who recognizes the wrongness of his choice and changes his mind. The tax collectors and prostitutes who were wrong in their ways have followed Christ and so, in changing their minds and their ways, are better for it. The chief priests and elders are in the wrong for insisting that their way is right, despite evidence to the contrary being presented, being present in their midst.

One very important note about the corrections offered by Paul and by Jesus is that both are done out of concern for others. Both wish for others to know God. In Paul's case, he seeks for God to be the unwavering strength for the Philippians in their trials, rather than reverting to relying on their own strength which will fail. Jesus, while we hear him chastising the religious leaders regularly, was not doing so for the enjoyment of correcting them, of being right when they are wrong. His aim with **all** he met was that they come to know God, the God of love about whom he came to teach, the God who welcomes tax collectors and prostitutes and even people who have gotten it wrong about God and God's son.

You are sitting here so I don't think you refuse to believe that Jesus was both sent by God and was God. You may have difficulty wrapping your head around it – and who does not – but you aren't actively arguing against it. Maybe in your trials you have relied more heavily on yourself than God at

times. Maybe you've even fallen away from the community of the church called to be of one mind, that is a mind of concern for others with a love which does its best to imitate God's love. In that way, these readings might directly relate to you. I think, more likely, we've all been faced with believing something which is wrong. It may have never been true or it may have been true once. I think it's safe to say we'll likely believe something wrong after today. It's part of who we are, as people and as a church. There's a reason we as Presbyterians live under the motto "ecclesia reformata semper reformanda," the church reformed and always being reformed. Sometimes that is fitting because we hear through the Holy Spirit new ways of being church. Sometimes it is fitting because we were wrong about something as church and the Holy Spirit, to the best of our understanding, has brought a corrected understanding to light. It's why we meet every two years as a Church (big C) so we can make sure we aren't stagnating when the Spirit is calling for change. I am grateful that active listening for the Spirit and a willingness to change as a result is part of our Presbyterian identity, even though we may take awhile to act on the Spirit's murmurings.

Personally? I'm much better at "shushing" the Spirit when I'm not ready to hear what is being said, when I'm not ready to be corrected, even when that correction comes out of love and an effort to bring me closer to God. Like I said, it doesn't feel good to be wrong, nor to have it pointed out. You might remember the episode of *The Brady Bunch* where Peter's voice was changing. The kids had formed a band and were recording an album as Peter's voice began to change. He was in great denial but, as life is portrayed in a 30-minute sitcom, he came to terms with it when his family rallied around him in accepting it. How did they do this? Why, by singing a song, of course!<sup>1</sup> The song was called *Time to Change* and the chorus went something like this: "When it's time to change, then it's time to change. / Don't fight the tide, come along for the ride, don't you see. / When it's time to change, you've got to rearrange / who you are into what you're gonna be." Cheesy? Yes. But the intent of acceptance still rings true.

Change, of any sort, is not easy and, like a changing voice, it takes time. I mention in the October newsletter in regards to the spiritual exercise program that no one jumps into an exercise program ready to run a marathon, or even a mile, the first day. Change of habit and change of mind both take time. Gilberto Collazo more eloquently relates it to our faith, saying, "We do not expect an instantaneous transformation of our life's attitudes and actions, but rather an ongoing process of change that results from the ever-growing awareness of our need to be at a different place if we are to be true Christ followers. The process begins with our conscious decision to become reflections of Christ in our

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<sup>1</sup> I say this all with utter fondness for the show and its formulaic ways.

actions and reactions to life.”<sup>2</sup> So I ask myself and I ask you, where is your ever-growing awareness? What has the Spirit been murmuring to you? What change is ready for a genesis in your life? We are all challenged by these questions so that we might ever come closer to God. Thanks be to God.

Let us pray: Open our eyes and our hearts and our minds to the change ever-working within us, we pray.  
Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> *Feasting on the Word: Year A, Volume 4*, p. 114.