

Series: HOLY LIVING: Outward Spiritual Disciplines
Sermon: Service

Philippeans 2:1-11, 14-16a

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

6
Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

7
rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

8
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

9
Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,

10
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

11
and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

14 Do everything without grumbling or arguing, 15 so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky 16 as you hold firmly to the word of life.

Sermon

I was in third grade, thumbing through the Encyclopedia Britannica, like you do, and I ran into the entry of the Titanic. It even had this picture. And it captivated me. I wanted to learn about the Titanic - and it was such a mystery, because we didn't know where it was. We were within years of finding it, but we didn't know that at that time. I could just imagine the ship, all by itself in the North Atlantic in the black of night - no moon that night. Totally alone in the dark. The ship, going as fast as it can, smacks into the Iceberg. Creates a gash in the Starboard side. A gash in the side of the ship below the water line. If you had to guess how big - How big was the gash in the ship? If you had to guess, the size of the gash that doomed the Titanic, the largest ship in the world at that time. Check out the stage, the size of this stage, from the floor to the ceiling, left to right, do you

think the gash was larger or smaller? Smaller. Try this. Check out the banners. The total square footage of these four banners. Was the gash smaller or larger than the size of our banners? Smaller. Try this, just take one banner. Was the gash larger or smaller? It was larger - sorry about the trick. It was the size of two of our banners, less square footage than a typical door that sank the largest ship in the world. That's why it took so long to sink. 2 hours and 40 minutes. Everyone had time to prepare for it's demise. The Lusitania, when it sank? 20 minutes. The Arizona? 14 minutes. It took a long while for the Titanic to sink - you all saw the movie. But unlike the image I had of the ship of being all alone out there, there were other ships within visual distance. Ships usually traveled together along the same shipping lanes - still true today. Let me tell you about one ship - I promise this is going somewhere...

Consider the Californian. As the Titanic was sinking, the lights of another ship were visible on the horizon. This ship had stopped for the night, presumably because it had seen or heard of icebergs in the area. It was only 5-10 miles away, according to witnesses on the Californian. The Titanic's crew tried to signal this ship by wireless Morse code messages, by blinking light, and by rocket flares. The crew of the Californian reported seeing the lights of a ship that night. That ship also was not moving, so they wondered how it eventually disappeared. But they thought little of it. The Californian also did not receive the Titanic's radio messages, because its radio had been turned off for the night. The Titanic sent up eight white rockets, and the crew of the Californian reported seeing eight white rockets. Three times the crew reported these rockets to their captain. But it was the middle of the night and he was asleep. They awoke him, but he said the rockets meant nothing. The captain thought it was because the Titanic was throwing a party. So the Californian, an empty ship with no passengers at that time, stood by while 1500 people drowned. It could easily have rescued most, if not all of them - according to the inquiry, but its captain did not believe there was a problem and was unwilling to be bothered in the middle of the night.

Another ship. Consider the Carpathia. As the Titanic sank, her wireless operators tried heroically to find another ship near enough to come to its rescue. A little after midnight they contacted the Carpathia, a small British ship about 58 miles away. The Titanic's message said: "...SOS--SOS... Come at once. We have struck a berg..." The radio operator of the Carpathia reported the message to his first officer. Together they barged into the room of Captain Arthur Rostron, waking him from a sound sleep. When he heard the message, this captain said, "All right, tell him we are coming along as fast as we can." Here is a description of this captain: "He was ... noted for his piety; he neither smoked nor drank, was never heard to use profanity, and in a day and age when recourse to the Almighty was not regarded as quaint or a sign of weakness, [he] was known to turn to prayer for guidance". The captain gave every command he could think of to prepare for a rescue mission. All routine work was stopped, life boats swung into place, lights rigged all along the ship's sides, all gangway doors opened, block and tackle made ready to hoist boats aboard and slings to lift the injured.

The captain had ordered full speed ahead, but the Carpathia only had a top speed of 14 knots. At that speed it would take 4 hours to reach the Titanic. The Captain determined to do better. He ordered all off-duty stokers to the engine room to get every ounce of steam the boilers could make. Heat and hot water were turned off throughout the ship. All power went to the engines. From its top speed of 14 knots, the Carpathia increased speed. 14 knots ... 15 knots ... 16 knots ... 17 knots -- 3 knots faster than her top speed, the Carpathia sped to rescue the perishing.

The captain ordered extra lookouts in the crow's nest, the bow, and the bridge. He was steaming faster than full speed in the middle of the night into an area where he knew there were icebergs, to rescue a ship that had already struck an iceberg.

The captain called the stewards together. He explained the plight of the Titanic and the mission of the Carpathia. He looked each man in the eye and said, "Every man to his post and let him do his duty like a true Englishman."

"In all this excitement, one other thing was not overlooked. The second officer noticed it. Then every man on the bridge noticed. Captain Rostron stood at the back of the bridge holding his cap an inch or two off his head, eyes closed, lips moving in silent prayer."

Of course, they got there too late for 1,500 people but it was the only ship that rescued 700 people from the sea and lifeboats. No other ship arrived.

Let me park that idea for a minute, and examine a story from 20 centuries ago. In the middle of the first century A.D., the Apostle Paul planted a small church in Philippi. It was one of his strongest young churches, a congregation that shared in Paul's ministry from its very beginning. Some years later, Paul wrote a letter to the Philippian Christians, partly to thank them for their financial support and partly to deal with problems in the church. One of these messes involved two prominent church leaders, Euodia and Syntyche, who were not getting along. And their drama was spilling over into the rest of the church. These two leading women, and perhaps others in the congregation who were taking sides with one or the other, needed an attitude adjustment.

Paul calls the Philippian believers to think and feel in a new way: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus . . ." The Greek verb translated as "let the same mind be in you" (*phroneo*) has to do not just with intellectual activity, but also with one's feelings or disposition. What is this attitude of Christ? Paul answers this question not so much with logical description as with poetic narration. In evocative language, he tells the story of Jesus' humility: Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

The Philippians, on the other hand, had an attitude of big briches and self-importance - not exactly the attitude of Christ, an attitude of humility, self-sacrifice, and servanthood. What Jesus exemplified in his incarnation and crucifixion, the Philippians are to imitate in their daily lives. Just as Jesus gave up his privileges, so should they. Just as Jesus served, so should they. Just as Jesus sacrificed, so should they. And so should we. The call of Scripture to have the attitude of Christ speaks to us just as pointedly as it once spoke to the Philippians. We too live in a time when people get so caught up in themselves that they neglect the concerns of others. Our workplaces are often filled with strife as colleagues try to out-position each other for raises and promotions. It can seem as if the self-promoting folk get all the rewards, whereas the servants are largely taken for granted. You can work faithfully in a company for a dozen years, only to lose the promotion you had expected to some brash, young outsider. How tempting it is to neglect that attitude of Christ and take on an attitude of greed and self-promotion!

Yet when we embrace servanthood in imitation of Christ, then we can be set free to live in a completely different way. We'll find new joy in helping others. What we might have experienced as inconvenient distractions can become chances to live like Christ. It's a lesson I need to hear. Don't take yourself too seriously. I am not above certain jobs. You are not above certain jobs. No one is above serving.

I remember a pastor who thought too highly of himself and wanted others to think of himself as above others. He was just appointed to a large church, first day in the office. Sitting at his desk. He heard someone come down the hall, so he picked up the phone off the desk to pretend to be in a conversation. And the person stopped in the doorway and stood there. The pastor continued, "Yes, Bishop, right away Bishop, that's what I would do. Thank you very much Bishop, I'll try." And he gave the guy in the doorway a quick look, "Can I help you? Can't you see I'm having an important phone call?" The guy said, "Take your time, I'm only here to connect and set up your phone." Pride cometh, they say...I love Romans 12 where it says, Be devoted to one another in love. Outdo one another in showing honor.

How to serve? That's really up to you. You can listen to someone. You can help someone out of a jam. You might not be the whole solution to someone's problem, but maybe just a step in the right direction. It may cost you a little time, a little effort. This might sound counterintuitive, but you could also allow yourself to be

served! Some of you wouldn't think twice about helping someone out, but would be mortified if someone gave you a helping hand. Let them help you - don't deny them the blessings of serving!

In the end, do you want to be the Californian? Or the Carpathia? One ship that sat idly by, and another that moved heaven and earth to save 700 souls. What happened to them in the end? The Californian, the ship that did nothing, was vilified in the press, and its captain, who never fully cleared his name. The ship was sunk a few years later by a German submarine. For the Carpathia, they were awarded medals by the survivors. Crew members were awarded bronze medals, officers silver, and Captain Rostron a silver cup and a gold medal, presented by the now Unsinkable Molly Brown. Rostron was knighted by King George V, and was later a guest of President Taft at the White House, where he was presented with a Congressional Gold Medal, the highest honour the United States Congress could confer. The Carpathia was also sunk by a German U-boat a few years later as well. We all share the same fate, but we are remembered by our love and service - or by our ambivalence. As for you - have the same mindset of Jesus. In humility, value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

And the family of God said, AMEN.