

**Sermon for Examination/New Hope Presbytery**  
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**Micah 6:8**

<sup>8</sup> He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

**Matthew 7:12**

<sup>12</sup> "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.

**Philippians 2:1-11**

<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<sup>1</sup> 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.

**Dear God, we are so grateful to be here today to worship you. Use me to teach and let the words that fall on the ears of this congregation be your words. A-men**

I am not the person you want to play follow the leader with. If I am not the leader, I pout, I want to be the first one in line, or I don't want to play...in fact, through my childhood I regularly figured out ways to be first, to be the leader, to call the games, to be "in charge." Even as a grown-up I don't do games well. I lead them just fine but am I awful at playing well with others. *My parents have been worried about me since kindergarten!*

You see, I need a little focus; I need to learn to work with others, to be like-minded with others, to focus on people other than me.....cause it just "ain't about Catherine."

Scripture is so plain here. Micah and other Old Testament prophets preached about justice and mercy and walking humbly with God.

The Golden Rule that we attribute to those Kindergarten teachers of old is actually scripture. Jesus shared this early in his preaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

- Do to others what you want to be done to you.
- Treat other people the way you want to be treated.

What a simple lesson.

Then Paul, writing to a group of old friends, people who loved him and whom he loved, people who had done for him, learned from him, supported his ministry; he reminds them of what they need to do to live together as a Christian community.

***If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.***

Christian friends, be of the same mind, have the same love—agape love—God's love—work together, plan together, think together....

Paul is asking these folks to be a team, to think alike, to have a common goal, a common plan, and a reason for what they are doing. They didn't need to work on individual projects, trying to best each other at every turn, they needed to pool their resources, each one bringing something special to the table and like the body of Christ we read about in I Corinthians 12...each part to come together as a whole and accomplish a task. Together, we can do so much more than we can when we work apart.

Think Sunday school class and Bible Study. When you read the scriptures, you go away from your reading with a good understanding of what you just read. Depending on how you read scripture, you may understand it in historical context or maybe how it can apply to your life, or maybe, you just don't know what that verse or that story is saying to you today. But, when you read and study with a group of people that discuss what they have learned when you glean the meaning of the word from the minds of other Christians, you get a different picture of how God is speaking to you today. If I were just reading the story of the Good Samaritan, I would know that some people will help and some will not. If I read this story with a class that is studying the scripture together;

- I learn that God calls all people to serve,
- That even the outcasts are children of God,
- That Samaritans have money,
- Even though they are "different," they are children of God and worthy of all that God offers to us.
- I learn that the road being traveled is a scary road to travel;

- I learn about the conditions of the day and how people in Jerusalem and Jericho lived, I come away with different ways to see this story and eventually focus on what God needs me and us to learn from this story for today.

As a group, working together, we just do better, we learn more, and we can get closer to that joy about which Paul writes.

***Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.***

Stop being selfish...it is not about you!  
Humble yourself and treat people better than you treat yourself.

Being selfish means being excessively concerned with oneself.  
Ambition is to have an ardent desire for fame or power.  
Conceit is to have a favorable opinion of one's worth or virtue.

Paul wants us to stop thinking about ourselves and focus on others. Treat other people better than we treat our selves. This isn't easy to do these days. Magazines bombard us with ads about how we can be more beautiful, improve ourselves and make the most of who we are. Spas and salons are popping up in neighborhoods everywhere making it more convenient for us to pamper ourselves. We spend countless dollars keeping ourselves comfortable. Television shows are telling us that we need to be beautiful, I am amazed at the number of programs that are out there that glorify facelifts and tummy tucks and drastic changes to our physical appearance...just to make us feel better about ourselves. We live in a me-centered world.

But what happens when we focus on ourselves? We stop thinking of others; we see people through the same eyes we see ourselves, through critical eyes, through unapproving eyes. When our focus is inward, we worry about how we feel, often at the expense of the feelings of those around us. We build up our own pleasures and forget about the comforts and needs of our friends and family.

It is easy to do this, in fact, most of the time; we don't even realize that our self-interests are taking over. We don't realize that the more we take for ourselves, the less is left for others, Others can be our family, our children, our co-workers, our church family, our community.

Think about it; we spend lots of time thinking about our own hopes and dreams; it is natural for us to look out for number one, to make sure we take care of ourselves...how do we overcome this need?

Paul tells us to be humble, not arrogant or proud, but submissive. Well, most of us think of humble as backing down and today's society would make us see humility as a weakness, something to overcome.

Once upon a time, I worked for a very large and growing church. We had lots of "assistants," folks who worked hard, think hard and spend their days keeping not only their "bosses" straight, but offering support for church members and community leaders every time they come in with a request. A lot of ministry happened there and they had some wonderfully talented leaders both in the congregation and on staff, but, if not for the work of the assistants, ladies who never get their names on the brochures or get recognized in meetings or even get the big offices, a lot of ministry just would not have happened.

When working at small churches, I found it to be the same way. Without the work of those "church mice" who keep air conditioners running, fold bulletins, answer phones, care for the facility, the list goes on, a lot wouldn't get done.

I suspect the same is true in most offices.... those people who work in support roles, those who serve, those who care for the needs of those around them are truly helping to make things happen.

When we stop and serve and care and assist others and work together to accomplish what God has called us to do, we can do mighty things, humbly, submitting to the needs of others.

***Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.***

What easy instructions here, look to the needs of others. This one sounds like the golden rule, treat others like you want to be treated. Such an easy rule to grasp and not always the easiest one to follow.

Putting others first sounds simple, and most of the time we can do this, well, except for when it is inconvenient. How many times have we put off taking that meal to the sick because

- we have just a few more things to do at home and the community outreach center is only open from 7:00 in the morning until noon, and
- we have to be at work at 9:00, so we just don't have time to help here, and
- visiting people in the nursing home, well, we have so many things to do around the house and lots of errands to run on Saturday, so we just can't find the time this week.

Maybe next week.

We want to help others, but it just isn't easy to fit all that outreach into our busy lives. We have so much to do, and we will get around to it soon.

The first part of this verse isn't look to the interest of others; it is don't look to your own interests. If we stop looking at our own interests, then there is time to care for the needs of those around us. If we get up in the morning and think what can I do for someone else today and do that first, it starts to get easier.

Take baby steps here, each day, one at a time, each moment, each opportunity. Don't think about yourself, think about others.

***Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, (the root word for same mind is think....think alike, harmonized thought)***

So, here is the impossible goal...be of the same mind as Christ...think like Jesus thought.

So, what do we know about how Jesus thought.

Jesus never put himself above God, he spoke about God reverently, and while He knew he was the Christ, God's son, he lived a humble life alongside fishermen and ordinary people. He served those around him, just look at the last supper he had with his disciples, he was the host, yet he stooped to his knees and washed the feet of his guests. He went to the cross and died for us; he gave his life for us, he thought about us and gave all he had on earth to make our lives better.

Think like Christ...suffer, serve, give for the others, no matter the cost to self.

Can we do that?

Can we give it all up for others, can we stop being the leader, can we play well with others, working as a team to make a difference in the world, in the community, in the local church?

I remember a birthday party for my friend Sarah Margaret. We played games on the front porch of her family's very big Victorian home. There was a coloring book prize involved. I don't remember wanting the coloring book, but I do remember wanting to win. I wasn't winning, so I took over for Sarah's big sister who was leading the games. We played the games I wanted to play, mother may I and red light green light. I cheated; I was selfish and wanted all the attention focused on me. Well, the attention didn't need to be focused on me; it was Sarah Margaret's birthday. My bossy and pushy personality didn't win me any friends that day or for weeks afterward.

I am still like this sometimes; I want to be in charge and run things my way. I often get confused and think I can do it better if I just take care of it myself. I make decisions in a vacuum and forget to include the people of God in my work and in my reasoning for that work, but I am learning to invite people to join me in the work of the church and in the work of the community and in the work of the Lord and if we are all working together and have only one leader, Jesus Christ, if we serve each other, keeping the needs and interests of others ahead of our own and with the heart of a servant go out into the world to teach and to serve and to learn and to fellowship we will be successful.

Most of us want to be the center, the focus, the main-thing, but it isn't about us, and we need to work hard on learning that.

So, when we need to follow the leader, we need to remember that Christ is the leader and he has given us the example to follow. Paul writes so clearly here about what we are to do, be of like minds, work together, put others first, humble ourselves, do nothing out of conceit, like Christ. By following this example; we will complete our joy and the joy of Almighty God.

**Almighty God, keep us mindful of your Son, Jesus Christ, and the humility he modeled for us to follow. Keep us focused on others and off of ourselves. Grant us grace through your Holy Spirit to follow Christ's example of true servanthood. In his name we pray. Amen.**