

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, and compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. (Philippians 2: 1-3)

Which of the two sons in Jesus' parable did the will of his father? *The one who changed his mind and went out to work* (Matt 21:29). The tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of the chief priests and the elders. (Matt 21:31-32). Why? because the chief priests and elders did not change their minds and believe. The question of mindful obedience to God's will is noteworthy.

In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus twice asks to be excused from obedience to God's will. Twice his plea is met with silence, wordlessly he submits. Paul says of Jesus, *he humbled himself and becomes obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross* (Phil 2:8). The mind that was in Christ, the one Paul implores the Philippians to have, is one of humility (Phil 2:5-7) and obedience.

To be of one mind, the same mind with the same love, is to be in Christ. Theologian Valerie Bridgeman wrote "I can still hear my mother's voice incredulously asking, "Have you lost your righteous mind!?" She would use this phrase when one of her children acted in a way that did not match their upbringing. "You know how to act," she would say. And that was inevitably followed by reminding us of our family rules. In some ways, that is what I read from Paul's words to the Philippians: A mentor-leader who wants those for whom he has some care to gather their "righteous minds" and make his joy complete (2:2). What does it mean to have the same mind, the same love, to be in full accord?

For years I assumed that to have "unity" meant there was never to be any difference in the way people thought or felt. But years of Uniting Church processes and relationships has taught me that unity does not mean uniformity. We can disagree about how a thing ought to happen, and if we are looking after others' interests and not just our own, we may well be on the road to "full accord." Diversity is not division, or necessarily dissent. But community *is* wholeness when we "empty ourselves," not in a self-defeating or death-dealing way, but in a way that considers how our lives serve the community's wholeness.

Jesus life, death and resurrection, established the most remarkable wholeness of community. The words of 'How Great is Our God' come to mind, *the Godhead 'Three in One'*, these words remind me of the holiness of our Triune God. God is a Communion of Love, a whole and Holy Presence that gives life, first one to another, Father, Son and Spirit, then to all followers. In this giving of self, we may also be complete. I think, our greatest testimony to following Christ is to selflessly enter into the wholeness of community. At the heart of that community is our worship.

Even now, to acknowledge that worship is the centre of a Christ following life, is strange to me. You see I came into the Uniting Church through the service arm of Lifeline. My faith grew in the midst of a motley bunch of Christians who were committed to serving the world through counsel and care. Worship was something we did as a community once a year. I figured it related to our heritage and to many of the volunteer's faith base. At that time, I didn't really know what worship was all about.

Fortunately, when I was studying for the ministry, I was given opportunities to grow in understanding. One of my ministry mentors convened the Assembly Worship Working Group. For me, that translated into an intentional consideration of what worship is and what the mind of Christ might mean in relationship to worship. Three words solidify that understanding for me; 1 – forming, 2 – transforming and 3 – performing.

Firstly, worship forms us into God's holy community. Since the ancient of days, offering our best to God and honouring God as the Source of all life, has formed community of faithful followers. No longer do we bring beasts and grain offerings, but we still bring gifts of music, prayer, thanks, finances and self. The intention, that we be formed into the community with the mind and obedience of Christ, is essential to worship. I believe the intention of worship is for us to offer ourselves, in humility and selflessness, in the honouring of God as the Source and Lord of all our lives.

Secondly, worship also transforms us. Jesus worshiped in spirit and truth (Jn 4:23). It didn't matter where that worship was. What mattered was that the living water, that only God can give, was a transforming reality. Thirst was quenched and life was made abundant through that transformation. We can come to worship weak, and we will be made strong. We can come grieved, and we will be comforted. We can come lonely, and we will be united in love. The intention of worship is to offer ourselves and to honour our God who transforms us evermore into the body of Christ.

Thirdly, in worship we perform our faith. In my experience many people misunderstand what it means to perform our faith. Some think it means we sing the songs that enliven us the most, or just the ones we know. Some think it means we pray in certain and familiar ways. Some people think that those who have specific roles in worship have a greater responsibility. Some people even think that there are performers and there are spectators in worship.

*Isaiah 58 verse 13 says; if you refrain from trampling the sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day; if you call the sabbath a delight and the holy day of the LORD honourable; if you honour it, not going your own ways, serving your own interest, or pursuing your own affairs; then you shall take delight in the LORD.*

It seems to me that Isaiah, Jesus, and Paul, are saying similar things. Get out of your own way and fill yourself with obedience and honouring your God. Then you too will be delight for one another and for God. You will be made whole and holy and your worship will be a performance of faith.

Another way to understand worship as performance of our faith is to consider the concept of ordered liberty of the Uniting Church. The Uniting Church has a heritage of Reformed and Evangelical traditions. In those traditions the liberty, or freedom, to which we are all heirs through Jesus was affirmed (Gal 5.1; 2 Cor 3:17). The theology of the order in worship was also affirmed.

In a nutshell what ordered liberty means is that we perform our offering of service through Word and Sacrament in a particular sequence. For example, we lay down our baggage (sin) prior to hearing the Word of God and celebrating in the Communion of Christ. We also have freedom within that order to express our particular communities authentic Spirit, in Christ. In my experience too often, we have mistaken freedom for preference.

Let's imagine then, what worship in the mind and spirit of Christ might look like. Firstly, I think it would be humble, every word or action *performed* would be a gracious expression of the whole community. A community *forming* itself into the one body. It would also be obedient; it would always put God first. That is, every part would be an offering to and an honouring of God. It would also be a true and authentic expression of the particular community of Christ we are.

It seems strange to include myself in the 'we' that we are. Mostly I haven't met you and some of you may even think that I have been forced upon you to '*do*' the transition work; work that some of you might not be too keen on. But since I have the privilege of leading worship, it must be 'we'.

I have to admit, I haven't had a lot of feedback regarding the worship since I started. Maybe that's because all I've had to work on is what Sandra had already established. I know that she had a few weeks with you before the lockdown, so hopefully there was a sense of coming together of minds and spirits to guide what we currently have. Until I hear otherwise, I will trust in that.

Friends, I am aware that there are differences of opinions and differences in style preferences, for music and theology among you. This is the same in every congregation I've ever served. *Unity is not uniformity* and differences do not need to lead to division. We are on a journey in this together.

For Jesus, the question of mindful obedience to God's will was noteworthy. Jesus didn't just die a humble death; he was crucified by the imperial powers of his day as an advocate of a vision of life that clashed with those powers. The vision of life that led to Jesus' death and resurrection, is the same vision that can lead to the death of our own divisive attitudes and it can lead to the birthing of new life in community.

My prayer is that together, we can come to know that vision and that we may live out our faith in humble service to our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

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