

“The Trade”
Philippians 2:1-11; Mark 14:7-11
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I. Introduction

“It’s time to trade them in.” The word came from my mom. I was in high school, and the trade she was demanding was my favorite Levi 501 jeans. I find jeans to be all different, and these fit just right. But they had gotten a lot of miles on them. Holes in each of the knees had been patched. Pockets had been repaired. They had gotten thin in places, and faded to light blue. I could only wear them around the house because my mom said they suggested I was homeless. “It’s time to trade them in.” My mom was right, but it was like leaving a good friend. Sometimes it’s hard to make the trade.

I hear a version of that now every once in a while. It doesn’t come from my mom, but from my wife. I get into this “groove” of wearing shirts, pants, ties.....and especially shoes. I just put them on. Then I’ll hear the kind suggestion, “Maybe it’s time to trade them in.” My normal response is, “They still got some more miles on them,” but I know she’s right.....usually. So in the end I make the trade. It’s time.

I’m feeling pretty good about my new glasses. I traded in my old frames for a new style. Jeanne wanted to be present when I picked out my new frames. I think she was concerned I’d go back to the old style. But I made the trade.

And sometimes it doesn’t work out as well. I remember years ago when my kids were young. I shaved off my beard. I’d always had a beard. My kids only knew me with a beard. The morning I shaved it off, when my boys (two or three at the time) saw me they cried. They thought I was a stranger. And my daughter had only a few words, “Dad, grow it back.” That’s all. Just....”Dad, grow it back.” So I did.

I think it’s easy to get use to a certain way. It’s comfortable and familiar. It’s what we’re use to. And even if it’s worn out.....and even if there’s a better way.....we often hang onto what we know. We resist the word “it’s time to make the trade.” We hang onto the brokenness of what we know, rather than the change of something new or a different way.....be it a job, an addiction, a way of raising kids that isn’t working, struggling in marriage, an exhausting and empty way of life.....and even our life and patterns together as a church. It can be hard to make the trade.

Paul writes to his friends in Philippi. Their church is struggling some with their life together. He writes to say “It’s time to make a trade.”

II. Text

Read Philippians 2:1-11.

III. Dialogue-Modern Translation

Philippi was called “little Rome.” It was about everything Roman. It was a place of Roman culture and values. It was a place of Roman religion and law. It was a place of retirement for veterans from the army. It a place proud to say “Caesar is lord.” And it was a place that understood life as the way of Roman power. Roman peace, Pax Romana,” was strictly enforced by power. Commerce was protected by power. Politics were all about power. Leaders and heroes held power. Life was directed by the flow of power. Perhaps this was not so different from our world.

A way of life directed by power....shaped by power.....valuing power, it was making its way into the church in Philippi. Not surprising the church was being shaped by the culture around them. In this text Paul writes to his friends, and says, “Trade it in. Trade in the way you know. Trade in this way of power. There is a different way.....there is a better way. Trade it in. It’s time.”

I’d like us to hear the text again as a type of dialogue; a conversation that Paul might have with his friends in the church in Philippi.

Paul (P)1-In your church in Philippi, do you find encouragement in being together?

Philippian Church (PC)1-Sure.

P2-What about love?

PC2-Of course. Life is sometimes hard, and we care for each other.

P3-Then I suppose you enjoy fellowship together.

PC3-It’s great. By the work of God’s Holy Spirit lots of different people are friends.

P4-And you share compassion and sympathy?

PC4-I’m sure we’re not perfect, but we do really care for each other. We help each other.

P5-It sounds like you have great life together as a church. If you would do one more thing.....one more thing, my joy for you would be complete.

PC5-What?

P6-It’s being one.....it’s being one together. It’s one mind, one love, one way of thinking with and about each other.

PC6-One? How do we do that?

P7-Don't be directed by selfish ambitions.
PC7-You must have heard about the fighting.

P8-Don't let conceit and pride be the way of the church.
PC8-We have some folks who struggle with that.

P9-The way is humility. Put the concerns for others first.
PC9-We've heard of Jesus' words, "All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." (Luke 14:11)

P10-And this one mind, one love and one way of thinking with and about each other.....it's the same mind and way of Christ.

PC10-Our life together is to be directed by Jesus' way of life?

P11-Yes. What I'm saying is live the confession you say when you worship.

PC11-Which one?

P12-Though Jesus was in God's form, he did not regard equality with God was something to use for himself....something to exploit for his own advantage.

PC12-Jesus is the pre-existing Christ, part of the Godhead before the beginning of time.

P13-Instead he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, and being born in human likeness. And as a human being he humbled himself, even to the point of death, death on a cross.

PC13-The incarnation, God coming as a human being in Jesus.....humble even to the point of death.

P14-Therefore God has highly exalted him, and has given him the name above all names. In the days to come every knee everywhere will bend, and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord, all to the glory of God.

PC14-The resurrected and exalted Lord Jesus Christ. All will know him as Lord, and the one God of all will be glorified.

P15-This one way of thinking, this mind of Christ, is about humility and service. It's the way of the church.....the way of the kingdom of God.....they way of God. It's the power of love.....not the power of will.

PC15-And in time, when the curtain is pulled back, all will humbly bow to the only one who stands exalted; Jesus Christ.

IV. Brief Exegesis

There are some problems in Philippi. The church is less than it might be. Selfishness and pride have found their ways into the life of the church. There's "parking lot politicking," pushing for "my way." The Roman ways of power have shown up in the church. Paul writes to say "It's time to trade them in. There is a better way."

Paul does two things to encourage his friends to "make a trade." First he asks them to think about their life together. They have experienced encouragement and love. They know about fellowship, compassion and care together as a church. Their life together already has been different than the Roman world around them. They know that. Paul just points that out.....and says "follow that way.....build on that. Go farther." They have found life as followers of Jesus not in selfishness, conceit and pride.....but rather in the humility and valuing the interests of each other. Paul wants them to reflect on their own experience, and grow in it.

The same can be said to us, can't it? We know our life together. We know the joy when we share encouragement, love, fellowship, compassion, and care together. We know the comfort when we are patient, humble, welcoming and forgiving. And we know the problems when we are selfish, proud and me-centered. That's the way of the culture around us that says "It's all about me." We know a different way. And we, too, are invited to grow in it.....to 'Go farther.'

And second, Paul wants the Philippians to reflect the way of Christ in their life together. To get them to think about this he uses something they already know. This litany about the self-emptying and exaltation of Christ is a very early church hymn or confession. And it captures some every early church reflection on the pre-existing nature of Christ, the incarnation, the resurrection and final reign of Christ, and the Trinity. But that's not Paul's point. Paul's point is very simply that in the humble service of Christ (self-emptying, serving, trusting, dying and rising again) we see the way of God....the way of the kingdom of God.....the way of the new heaven and new earth..... and thus the way of the church. We're not called to reflect the way of the world. Rather we're called to be a counter-cultural community of the way of God. "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5), and nothing less.

V. Brief Reflections

The main point of this text is not unity. People and groups can be unified around destructive ideas. Terrorists groups and the Aryan Nations bear witness to that, as they are unified around fear and hate. Rather, the theological center of this text is Jesus Christ.....the nature and way of Christ.....or as Paul says "having the same mind as

Christ Jesus.” The idea is trading in other ways as a follower of Jesus, and following the way of Jesus.....the attitudes of Jesus.....the “mind of Jesus.”

In Philippi the “mind of Jesus” meant humility and service. As their church struggled with pride and selfishness, Paul reminds them of another way. The Lord they confessed to follow emptied himself to serve, give, care and love. Jesus shows the way of God, the way of the kingdom of God.....and way that is to be the church. They are to trade in the ways of Roman power, and live together in Jesus’ way.

Having “the mind Jesus” also means other trades. Last Sunday everyone in worship got a small, glass gem stone. I asked that you put it in your pocket, or in your purse, or in a place where you will see it regularly. I asked that it be a reminder to you that:

“You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. To live is Christ.”

How goes it for you? This past week I was in the Express Lane at Giant Eagle, in a hurry, and things were taking longer than I thought they should. The person ahead of me certainly had more than “12 items.” I then reached in my pocket and felt that glass gem stone.....and began to think about “salt, light, living for Christ.” I knew I needed to change my attitude. I took a deep breath, waited patiently, and when it was my turn to “check out” I made a point of encouraging the clerk. It’s a small thing. But I think “the mind of Jesus” is about lots of small things, because life is filled with small things.....and it’s doing them, both small and big, as Jesus would do them....”salt, light and living for Christ.”

How goes that for you? I think it might be a good thing to once a month have someone share a story about “salt and light, and living for Christ,” how we live out the Christian faith in our lives....how a simple thing like a glass gem stone get us thinking differently.....living differently. If you were to share a story, what would you share? I think I’m going to keep the glass gem stones in a bowl on the communion table this summer as a reminder. And if you need one take one.....because they are all about trading one way of life for another.....for “the mind of Christ.”

(Show video clip, “Are You a Trader,” from rightnow.)

This morning some folks from our church traded in a week of vacation to go to Mexico to build a house for a family in need. And during the fall and spring some other folks here trade in a few hours on Thursday afternoons to mentor and care for 5th and 6th graders to need an adult in their lives to care for them. And today some other church members traded in a little time and a little money on pledge card to help get food to

hungry children in our neighborhoods in our Backpack Food Mission. And we're all asked to trade in old ways of pride, so we can do much more ministry and mission in partnership with Covenant Presbyterian Church. What are you trading?

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 2:5) It's time to trade in other ways of life for the mind that was in Christ Jesus. Are you a trader?