

Sunday, August 27, 2006

Giving In to Give Out

Philippians 2:1-13

Summer Communion Breakfast Meditation

Rev. Richard K. Gelson, Fairmount Presbyterian Church

I hope you all are enjoying this morning's food and fellowship! I have to ask everyone to stop chewing and gulping for just a second, though. Long enough for you all to repeat after me as I say the following –

Surrender ... leads to Peace ... which leads to Loving. We are ... Giving in ... to Give Out!

Thank you, you may now resume your gastronomic needs. I just wanted to make sure you all really and deeply heard those words, and what better way than to hear them coming from your own heads!

This whole theological, spiritually practical import of this morning's scripture from the Apostle Paul's letter to the early Christians living in Phillipi can be summarized by saying that *surrender leads to peace which leads to loving*. How do we *give in*, that is, how do we surrender in order to find God's abiding peace, in order to *give out*, that is, to love the Lord so much that we realize we do not have a choice about loving our neighbors as ourselves? Philippians gives us strong counsel.

We must do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit and regard others as better than ourselves (v. 3).

We must let the same mind be in us that we in Christ Jesus (v. 5).

And we must have utterly reverent trust that God is a work within each of us, according to God's good pleasure. (v.13).

Let's briefly consider these three admonitions ... not as steps to spiritual success so much as the process we all are going through in order to become spiritually mature disciples of Jesus ...

At various points in our lives we've all felt the need to be better than someone else at one thing or another. From being better than Grandpa Joe at Checkers to surpassing someone higher up on the corporate ladder to having more patience with your kids than the next mom to getting ahead of the competition by showing superior quality and profitability like a preening peacock. Progressive self-advancement is a cherished American practice.

In order to be successful, it requires a certain build-up of self-pride. But there's a strong word for too much superiority seeking self-pride -- "conceit."

Conceit is a spiritually-charged problem because it makes self-pride your god ... the Lord and Master of all you survey ... the dictator of all your doings. There is a fine but eternally critical line between believing in yourself in healthy, goal-setting ways and believing in yourself as god, as if you can somehow possess all knowledge of good and evil.

Now Jesus, when he walked among us, was, of course, fully God. So ... was Jesus conceited? No! He repeatedly *gave in*, that is, he surrendered his divine power, in order to *give out*, to give himself for the sake of others. Over and against sinful conceit, Jesus is the definitive example of its holy counterpart *humility*. Doesn't mean he didn't set goals and experience the full range of human emotions, but it does mean that at the end of every day he knew his true station in life as a servant of heavenly life. The Apostle Paul reminds us that though Jesus was in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave. (Phil. 2:6-7). When any of us feels pressed between self-advancement and God-advancement, we need only turn to the teachings and personal example of Jesus as our pressure release valve. Giving in to give out requires the discipline of humility he exemplifies.

To put this another way, the way said in Philippians chapter 2, we need to let the same mind that was in Jesus be in us. We need to be obedient to God's will in the same way He was, meaning, especially, we will not turn away from God even if it costs us. Now, we do not have His exact mind ... we have our own divinely blessed minds. So best we

can do is fill our minds in a way that helps us think like Him. Ask and ask and ask -- what would Jesus do?

We won't ever have an answer unless we are studying the Bible intentionally and eagerly. We won't have an answer unless we are praising God the Father first and foremost every day. We won't have an answer unless we look at one another and every neighbor in this world through Jesus' eyes, which is the loving, reconciling vision of God for all.

Gain more of His mind by attending the Women's Bible Study and the Wednesday Morning Men's Breakfast Fellowship. Gain more of His mind by being in Sunday morning worship every week, and if you are out of town, find a satellite sanctuary to feed off of. Gain more of His mind by reading your Bible and any of the great devotional books and magazines while you are alone and with family. Gain more of His mind by having a heart-to-heart with a Bible teacher whose wisdom you respect. If you want to give in to God in order to give out for God, you've got to gain the mind of Christ.

Ah, but our lives are so busy, so crowded with responsibilities and time constraints. If this is a default reaction to my exhortations, then perhaps you need to work on reverently trusting that God is indeed always at work within you. God, through the intercessions of the Holy Spirit, is always working on making us holier. The fancy way of saying this is that we who have faith enough to believe it are always being *sanctified*. At every edge and inward boundary of our lives, we are being transferred toward the *sanctuary* of heavenly life, where life is purely *sacred*. Faith in this holy touch and movement gives us amazing inner peace, and inspires us to selfless, outward, loving service.

We need to be reminded often about God's transformative peace and presence alive in our lives. Which is why we regularly sit down together around our Lord's table. Here, through the Lord's Supper, we are filled with what we need to sustain our faith journeys. Our minds feed on the symbolic meaning of Christ's blood and body, that he gave his life for our salvation. When we prayerfully receive these outward signs of God's inner grace, we surrender to the Spirit. John Calvin preached that through this Supper, the Spirit takes us up to our seats at the heavenly banquet, where we share in table

fellowship will all the saints around the ⁴ world and all who have gone before us. It's a beautiful image, one that lifts us from this place today to the place where our Lord is intimately giving out His sustenance for all.

Friends, let's surrender now. Let's be led to peace. Let's be led to loving service. Let's give in to give out.

Please join me in our Lord's Prayer ...