

The Mind of Christ

Luke 19:28-40; Philippians 2:5-11

Lethbridge Mennonite Church

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Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus...

On this Palm Sunday, 2022, I want to reflect on one question: What does it mean to have the mind of Christ?

I think that most of us would agree that “the mind of Christ” is a pretty good thing to have (or at least to *want* to have).

But in urging us to “have” the mind of Christ Paul seems to implicitly acknowledge that *not* having the mind of Christ is an option. Paul knows that the human mind is a contested space.

There is plenty of competition out there for our minds. You may have noticed. The mind of Christ, whatever it is, does not represent an automatic way of being in the world.

Christ has rivals when it comes to human minds and hearts and souls.

At least three come to mind—minds out there that work against the mind of Christ. There are likely others, but these three seem to dominate our time and place.

The first rival to the mind of Christ is the mind of a consumer.

There are almost endless forces in our world that seek to convince us that to be human is to consume things.

It doesn't really matter what these things are. Stuff, experiences, entertainment, the list could (and does) go on and on and on.

I recently heard that the average North American encounters six thousand advertisements a day! This seems insanely high to me, but who would doubt that this could be true?

These come at us from our televisions, computers, phones, print media, radio, physical signs on buildings and streets. I was in Calgary yesterday and I counted on well over a hundred in a two-block stretch near the MCC store, each one competing for my attention and my dollars.

Recently, we seem to be increasingly turning our vehicles into our own personal advertising agencies.

There is the familiar advertising of businesses, certainly. But more and more there are all kinds of stickers and flags and slogans plastered on bumpers and back windows advocating various ideologies and causes, opinions about our political leaders and where they might go and how they might get there. Some of these advertisements come with rather creative and graphic illustrations!

Advertising is literally everywhere.

The message, endlessly reinforced in a wide variety of ways, is that you are always a purchase away from true happiness and fulfillment. Virtually limitless resources are devoted to the manufacturing of discontent because people who are content and satisfied don't tend to spend enough to keep the economic engine churning.

When we adopt the mind of a consumer we are reduced to economic units. The central task of being human becomes to be productive in order to be able to consume. We become restless and acquisitive.

This mind of a consumer is obviously very different from the mind of Christ. Jesus lived a life of simplicity and relative poverty. He had no place to lay his head. He taught contentment and trust. He said that that the love of money was the root of all evil.

The second major rival to the mind of Christ that I see out there right now is what some have called the righteous mind.

This mind sees human life as an ideological competition and a moral performance. The dominant domains that the righteous mind is active and energized is often in religion and politics and how these weave their way through the social issues of our time.

Indeed, the righteous mind treats religion as politics. Or politics as religion.

The righteous mind is similar to the mind of the Pharisees in Jesus' time. It is constantly evaluating the behaviour and beliefs of others, constantly policing and judging, constantly seeking to reinforce its own rightness and the wrongness of others.

We see this every day in our world, particularly online. Those who have the wrong views are shamed and punished. Those who have the "right" views are trained to endlessly parade these online for the approval of those watching and clicking and liking and sharing.

Every issue becomes a litmus test of purity for the righteous mind. Whether it is Covid or issues around gender identity or race or sexuality or political allegiance or _____, the righteous mind seeks always to draw the lines between the clean and the unclean.

Our public discourse becomes a polarized shouting match with two sides drifting ever further apart. Every interaction becomes a kind of sorting exercise where we place people into "good" and "bad" categories based on what they think about the matters that we care most deeply about.

The righteous mind has no patience for nuance, and little grace for the realities of human nature. It also has little appreciation of its own limitations—the idea that it might not see entirely clearly either.

The righteous mind might seem to be better than the mind of a consumer. Surely Jesus would want us to be righteous, right?

But Jesus had an awful lot to say about *self*-righteousness. Indeed, there were few groups of people that Jesus was more critical of than those with a pharisaical mindset, those who sought always to separate the sinners from the righteous.

Jesus said, "you'd better take that log out of your own eye before you go digging around for the speck that you detect in your neighbour's. Jesus said, "whatever criteria you judge by, you'd better prepared to have it coming back in your direction."

Jesus said, "I haven't come for the healthy but the sick." Jesus was called "the friend of sinners."

The righteous mind would rather condemn than befriend sinners.

The last major rival to the mind of Christ that I see is what I'll call the authentic mind.

This mind could be summed up in the common phrases, "You do you" or "Just be true to yourself."

This is perhaps the most powerful mind of our cultural moment. And to be clear, there is something good and true about it.

For much of history, human individuality was squelched and stifled by oppressive structures and systems that demanded conformity.

There is something profoundly good and true about the freedom that many now experience to choose their own paths, to explore, to experiment, to create a life using the unique gifts that God has given.

But... (You knew there was a “but” coming, right?)

As a broad narrative for what it means to be human, “You do you” is profoundly inadequate.

We don’t need to look very far for evidence of this. To put it bluntly, we’re not “doing us” terribly well. Anxiety, depression, addiction, loneliness, confusion, the collapse of families, and relational chaos are rampant.

Institutions and communities are breaking down. Wars and conflict are ever-present realities in a world where “you do you” collides with all kinds of other “you do yours.”

Many feel paralyzed by the amount of choice out there, with the felt imperative to go and live a life worthy of posting on social media. “You do you” can feel liberating for some. But it can also feel like a straitjacket.

In the secular void of meaning, the self has to carry a lot of existential weight. And we’re not all carrying it very well. We weren’t meant to. We weren’t meant to have to constantly be creating and curating ourselves in front of a watching audience.

The authentic mind embraces much that is good and true. But taken as a whole life philosophy, “You do you” and “be true to yourself” are woefully inadequate.

Jesus taught and modeled submission to the will and the purposes of God. “Be true to yourself to a point,” Jesus might have said. “But be truer to God.”

So, here on Palm Sunday we encounter Jesus entering Jerusalem. He enters on a humble colt to great expectations, but we know that he is not marching to a military victory but to a cross.

What do we learn about the mind of Christ on Palm Sunday? Well, among other things I think we see a powerful critique of each of the rival minds I have discussed thus far.

Jesus does not come to Jerusalem as a consumer. He does not come to acquire or accumulate, to display his power.

He enters the city in the same way that he lived his life: a poor, itinerant teacher and healer, with not many possessions to speak of and no apparent desire for more. He enters with great fanfare, but in decidedly unimpressive circumstances. No warhorse or military entourage for Jesus. Just a humble colt and a handful of disciples.

Jesus does not buy into the lie that we are what we have or what we can get or consume. He knows, particularly at this stage of his life, that there is much more to a human life than this.

Jesus does not come into Jerusalem in flurry of self-righteous anger. Even though Jesus is the only truly righteous one, he does not condemn or reproach. He stays mostly silent even in the face of outright lies and malicious accusations and a farce of a trial.

He will not even condemn those who are driving the nails into his hands and feet and hoisting him up on a god-awful cross. Instead, he prays that God would forgive these sinners who don't know what they are doing.

Jesus does not come to Jerusalem to be true to himself (again, even though he is the only self ultimately worth being true to!).

He models not authenticity but obedience. He does not assert his own will but humbly submits to the will of the Father. *Not my will but yours.* Jesus' anguished prayer in the garden could hardly stand in more stark contrast to the ethos of our day.

Holy Week is the week where Jesus enacts what he teaches. He shows us the mind of Christ in action.

Which brings us finally to Philippians 2. In this passage, Paul quotes what many scholars believe to be one of the oldest hymns or poems of the church, probably written only a few years after the first Easter.

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.

N.T. Wright once said that Jesus shows us “a God who is known most clearly when *he abandons his rights for the sake of the world.*”

Jesus models a refusal to scramble for advantage. Choosing the path of servanthood. Humbling oneself. Being obedient and submissive to the will of God.

This is no glorification of weakness. Many people have accused Christianity of this. And sadly, many Christian leaders have abused passages like this to keep vulnerable and powerless people in their place. *You should be content in your low position because you are being like Jesus!*

But this passage is not about glorifying weakness or keeping people with no power in their place. That is not what is going on here.

Jesus chose each one of these approaches deliberately and intentionally. This is a display of strength, conviction, and power.

This is a way of being in the world that is freely chosen.

It is a protest against all the wearisome grasping after status, reputation, and righteousness that our world knows only too well.

I don't know what you think when you hear a sermon like this.

Maybe you hear something like, “Well, great! I guess I have to go out and get busy having the mind of Christ! On top of all the other things I must do in my life—on top of the bills and the kids and the job and anxieties about my grandkids and health concerns—now I have to figure this out, too!”

I have good news for you. The mind of Christ—like all of God's good gifts—is just that. A gift.

To say that it is a gift is not to say that we are merely passive recipients. We have a role to play. We have choices to make.

There is value in understanding the things in our world that draw us away from the mind of Christ. I wouldn't have structured my sermon the way I did if I didn't believe that this was true.

It is good to be mindful of the ways in which consumption, self-righteousness, and certain narratives of personal authenticity draw us away from mind of Christ. God does calls us to wisdom and discernment.

But I fundamentally believe that the good news of the gospel is not, “Be better and try harder for Jesus!” It is, rather, “Believe and receive the hope and the blessing of what God, in Christ, has accomplished on your behalf and for the sake of the world.”

The mind of Christ isn’t something we have to conjure up. It is a gift to be received and gracefully tutored in over the course of a lifetime.

Elsewhere, when addressing the church in Corinth, Paul talks about how God has given us his spirit for discernment. He quotes the prophet Isaiah in asking a hypothetical question:

“For who has known the mind of the Lord
so as to instruct him?”

The implied answer is obvious: “no one.” God’s ways are immeasurably beyond us. This is the context of the quote from Isaiah.

But Paul goes on to end the passage thus:

But we have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16).

We have the mind of Christ. Already. Those of us who have cast our lot with Jesus already have his mind at work in our hearts and minds.

We don’t have to go find it. We don’t have to create it by an exercise of sheer will alone. It is not far from any of us.

Moses was not speaking specifically of the mind of Christ when he addressed the Israelites in the book of Deuteronomy. But his words pointed beyond their immediate context, echoing right down to the present.

Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say, “Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?” Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, “Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us so

that we may hear it and observe it?” **No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe** (Deut. 30:11-14).

As we head out into Holy Week—a week marked by suffering and apparent weakness—may God anchor the “foolishness” of Christ deep in our souls.

May the mind of Christ that is already in us graciously and lovingly overwhelm and overrule all the other “minds” that compete for space in our lives.

Amen.

