

## Pastor Letter: The Mind of Christ (2/5/23)

The past 48 hours have been a spiritual rollercoaster as I dealt with a wide range of issues that have bombarded my life as a Minister of Word and Sacrament, Preacher, and Pastor. These are just a few of the areas that I have been wrestling with as a called clergyman who attempts to juggle a chainsaw, watermelon, and a tennis ball.

Last week I agreed to serve on the 5 member clergy team of our upcoming Kairos-39 spring 5-day weekend retreat in the Lake Erie Correctional Institution. We meet for 7 training sessions of the inside team, outside team, and advisory council. Since agreeing to serve on the clergy team and advisory council I have discerned a vicious evil spiritual attack on our membership, various selected teams, and their families.

My cell-phone has not stopped jingling with prayer requests and messages since I agreed to serve with this group of dedicated and faithful Christians on the clergy team. The evil one is working overtime to place landmines and stumbling blocks of all kinds in our pathways of faith and our responsibility as spiritual warriors. The prayer concerns are of a wide range of physical, emotional, and spiritual natures. We also receive and send uplifting prayers within the group that address the respective issues at hand. God is good, even in the midst of the spiritual battles!

Last week I wrote a message and sermon about “walking with God” that highlighted two books. One, *Walking with God* by John Eldredge and the other *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas á Kempis, a 14<sup>th</sup> century priest. Since we are expanding last week’s themes to include prayer, fasting, and engaging the Holy Spirit, I am including another book, *Encountering God: Christian Faith in Turbulent Times*, by Andrew Purves and Charles Partee. This week I am addressing the theme of “developing the mind of Christ.”

Last week, the prophet, Micah, spoke the word of the Lord to a disobedient Israel (she accused God of not responding to their rituals and sacrifices) saying, “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?”, (v 6:8).

This week the prophet, Isaiah, writes nearly the same thing when Judah accuses the Lord of not responding to their fasting rituals, “they ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near to God. ‘Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?’” (Isa. 58:2-3). The Lord responds, “Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers. Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high,” (vv. 3-4).

Isaiah speaks the word of the Lord saying, “Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?” (vv. 6-7).

Both Old Testament prophets are instructing Judah and Israel to not depend on empty rituals to earn the Lord’s favor but fulfill their responsibility to God’s Covenant by serving the Lord by being salt and light to a fallen world. They are to put their faith into dynamic and obedient action, as opposed to mere lip service and empty rituals.

The apostle Paul instructs the Corinthian congregation to set aside their petty differences and embrace their unity in the cross of Jesus Christ. Paul informs them that they demonstrate 2 different wisdoms, 2 different spirits, 2 different persons, and 2

different human perceptions. The first group embraces the wisdom of this earthly age, the human spirit, intellectual philosophies, and unspiritual human perceptions. The second group embraces the wisdom of God, the Holy Spirit of God, the spiritual person, and the availability of the spiritual gifts of God. Paul writes concerning this second group, "So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual," (vv. 11-13). The first group is perishing, the second is being saved through the power of Almighty God.

Many individuals and even Christians attempt to pacify or endear themselves to God by performing empty physical gestures much like the Israelites in our OT lesson. Paul is attempting to persuade his readers to spiritually embrace the cross of Christ by leading them to comprehend the mind of the Lord and Jesus Christ, "Those who are spiritual, discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny. 'For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?' But we have the mind of Christ," (vv. 15-16). Purves writes in his book, "to be Christian means to live in the mind (1 Cor. 2:16) and spirit (Rom. 8:9) of Jesus Christ."<sup>1</sup>

It has taken me a lifetime to learn how to recognize, discern, combat, and chase away the forces of evil. The apostle Paul writes about having the mind of Christ in many of his epistles and give us tools how to embrace this spiritual endeavor. The one sure avenue to God's ear is to pray in a trinitarian attitude. Our human spirit encounters the Holy Spirit who interprets what is in our hearts, even when we do not have the verbal words to communicate. The Holy Spirit gives our prayers to Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who sits at the right hand of God, the Father. The Son prays for us 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and relates our prayers to the Father. Our Prayers are answered in the reverse, when the Father communicates with the Son, who communicates with the Holy Spirit who communicates with our human spirit.

To embrace the mind of Christ is to mimic our Lord's humility in all obedience before his heavenly Father in every area of his earthly ministry. We too should humble ourselves before a righteous and loving heavenly Father who created an avenue through his Son, Jesus Christ, who enabled us as sinful human beings to become heirs of the Kingdom of God. Our spiritual union with Jesus Christ makes all our spiritual endeavors effective.

Embracing the mind of Christ means becoming faithful disciples of our Lord by obediently carrying on his mission of spreading the Gospel message to a fallen world through the power of the Holy Spirit. We put our faith into dynamic action when we accomplish the will of God, in the same manner as Jesus the Christ.

May you learn to hear that still quiet voice of God, humbly walk with the Lord, embrace the mind of Christ, and engage in your spiritual battles, trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Pastor Larry

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Purves and Charles Partee, *Encountering God: Christian Faith in Turbulent Times*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000) p. 44.