Pastor Barry South, CP First Presbyterian Church Grand Bay September 27, 2026

Sermon: "Encouragement, Consolation, Compassion, and Sympathy"
Scripture: Philippians 2:1-13
If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion or sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than themselves. Let each of you look not to your own interest, but to the interest of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, thought 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 the cross. Therefore, God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.
THIS IS THE WORD OF THE LORD.

The one danger that threatened the Philippian church was that of disunity. There is a sense in which that is the danger of every healthy church. It is when people are really serious, and their beliefs really matter to them that they are apt to come into conflict with one another. The greater their enthusiasm, the greater the danger that they may collide. It is against that danger Paul wishes to safeguard the Philippians.
In verses 3-4, he gives us the three great causes of disunity. There is selfish ambition. There is always the danger that people might work not to advance the work but to advance themselves. It is extraordinary how time and again the great leaders of the Church almost fled from office in the agony of the sense of their own unworthiness.
There is the desire for personal prestige. Prestige is for many people an even greater temptation than wealth.

To be admired and respected, to have a seat on the platform, to have one's opinion sought, to be known by name and appearance, even to be flattered, are for many people most desirable things. But the aim of Christians ought to be not self-display but self-obliteration. We should do good deeds, not in order that others may glorify us, but that they may glorify our Father in heaven. Christians should desire to focus people's eyes not upon themselves but on God.
There is concentration on self. If we are always concerned first and foremost with our own interest, we are bound to come into conflict with others. If for us life is a competition whose prizes we must win, we will always think of other human beings as enemies or at least as opponents who must be pushed out of the way. Concentration on self inevitably means elimination of others, and the object of life becomes not to help others up but to put them down.
Faced with this danger of disunity, Paul sets down five considerations which ought to prevent disharmony. The fact that we are all in Christ should keep us in unity. No one can walk in disunity with other people and in unity with Christ.
If we have Christ as a companion on the way, we inevitably become companions of others. The relationships we hold with other people are no bad indication of our relationship with Jesus Christ.
The power of Christian love should keep us in unity. Christian love is that unconquered goodwill which never knows bitterness and never seeks anything but the good of others. It is not a mere reaction of the heart, as human love is; it is a victory of the will, achieved by the help of Jesus Christ. It does

not mean loving only those who love us, or those whom we like, or those who are lovable. It means an unconquerable goodwill even to those who hate us, to those whom we do not like, to those who are unlovely. This is the very essence of the Christian life; and it affects us in the present time and in eternity.

The fact that they share in the Holy Spirit should keep Christians from disunity. The Holy Spirit binds individuals to God and to one another. It is the Spirit who enables us to live that life of love, which is the life of God; if we live in disunity with others, we thereby show that the gift of the spirit is not ours.

The existence of human compassion should keep people from disunity. Human beings were never meant to be snarling wolves but were meant to live in fellowship together. Disunity breaks the very structure of life.

Paul's last appeal is the personal one. There can be no happiness for him as long as he knows that there is disunity in the church which is dear to him. If they want to bring him perfect joy, they must perfect their fellowship. It is not with a threat that Paul speaks to the Christians of Philippi but with the appeal to love.

Paul is pleading with the Philippians to live in harmony, to lay aside their discords, to shed their personal ambitions and their pride and their desire for prominence and prestige, and to have in their hearts that humble, selfless desire to serve, which was the essence of the life of Christ. His final and unanswerable appeal is to point to the example of Jesus Christ.

So, Paul says of Jesus that he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. The great characteristics of Jesus' life were humility, obedience, and self-renunciation. He wanted not to dominate men and women but only to serve them; he wanted not his own way but only God's way; he wanted not to exalt himself but only to renounce all his glory for the sake of the world. Again and again, the New Testament is sure that only those who humble themselves will be exalted (Matthew 23:12; Luke 14:11, 18:14). If humility, obedience and self-renunciation were the supreme characteristics of the life of Jesus, they must also be the hallmark of Christians. Selfishness, self-seeking and self-display destroy our likeness to Christ and our fellowship with each other.

But the self-renunciation of Jesus Christ brought him the greater glory. It made certain that one day, sooner or later, every living creature in all the universe – in heaven, in earth and even in hell – would worship him. It is to be carefully noted where that worship comes from. It comes from love. Jesus won the hearts of men and women, not by forcing them through his power, but by showing them a love they could not resist.

At the sight of this person who set aside his glory for all people and loved them to the extent of dying for them on the cross, human hearts are melted and human resistance is broken down. When people worship Jesus Christ, they fall at his feet in wondering love.

Philippians 2:11 is one of the most important verses in the New Testament. In it, we read that the aim of God is a day when every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. These four words were the first creed that the Christian Church ever had. To be a Christian was to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Romans 10:9). This was a simple creed, yet all embracing. But it is still true that anyone who can say "For me, Jesus Christ is Lord" is a Christian. If we can say that, we mean that Jesus Christ is unique and that we are prepared to give him an obedience we are prepared to give no one else. We may not be able to put into words who and what we believe Jesus to be; but, as long as there is in our hearts this wondering love and in our lives this unquestioning obedience, we are indeed Christians, because Christianity consists less in the mind's understanding than it does in the heart's love.

The day will come when people will call Jesus Lord, but they will do so to the glory of God the Father. The whole aim of Jesus is not his own glory but God's. Jesus draws men and women to himself that he may draw them to God. In the Philippian Church, there were some whose aim was to gratify a selfish ambition; the aim of Jesus was to serve others, no matter what depths of self-renunciation that service might involve. In the Philippian Church, there were those whose aim was to focus people's eyes upon

themselves; the aim of Jesus was to focus people's eyes upon God. So, the followers of Christ must think always not of themselves but of others, not of their own glory but of the glory of God.
The celebrated pacifist Mohandas Gandhi is reported to have said, "I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ." He made this observation in the midst of his struggle for justice for a people in the face of the occupation of his native India.
We are called to be imitators of Christ, to live in a way that allows other people to see Christ in us. What is an imitator? There is a difference between an impersonator and an imitator. Impersonators take great pains to make people believe they are who they are not. On the other hand, imitators are clearly aware that they strive to live up to the challenge of being a reflection of the person they look up to. It is so hard to walk in the footsteps of others. Many younger siblings for years wither in the shadow of an overachieving older sibling, who sets the standard so high that it is a constant frustration to try to be like him or her. We look up to those people in church whom we consider spiritual giants and wonder if we will ever be as spiritual as they appear. At work there is always that co-worker who is the top salesperson, who makes us wonder if we really have what it takes to live up to those high standards, no matter how hard we try.
Deep down inside, many of us have the clear understanding that we will fall short of a perfect imitation. That is alright. Ultimately Paul's admonition is not about impersonating Christ, but about adopting Christlike attitudes in all aspects of our life. When we try to live up to God's standards on our own, we become impersonators, and it is not what God expects of us.
So then, what does it mean to be called a reflection of Christ? This is not a call to perfection but, rather, an invitation to be honest with ourselves and to understand that God is doing something unique and special in each and everyone of us. This is God's challenge for us to live in a manner that is counter cultural. For example, when we face a national crisis such as severe economic downturn, do we run around like "Chicken Little" screaming, "The sky is falling", or do we reflect Christ by remaining calm and believing God's promises of provision for our lives? When bad news reaches out ears, do we respond like those who live without faith, or do we reflect Christ by our reactions to the bad news.
Christian living is a process. God's timeline for each one of us is unique, and only God knows what the final product is going to look like. We do not expect an instantaneous transformation of our life's attitudes and actions, but rather an ongoing process of change that results from the ever-growing awareness of our need to be at a different place if we are to be true Christ followers.
The process begins with our conscious decision to become reflections of Christ in our actions and reactions to life.
Can the world see Christ in us? Our imitation of him is not about being complacent and well behaved. As the United States deals with immigration issues, many churches have once again declared themselves to be sanctuaries for all who need a safe place. I see Christ in the actions of these faith communities. Allowing the world to see Christ in us means that we are willing to step up to our prophetic role in the world. Can People see Christ in you?

Closing Prayer: Eternal God, your hand shaped our lives by grace and your hand rescued us from sin by love. May your hand guide us through this day, shielding us from evil, strengthening us to do justice and love, in Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

Benediction: When times get difficult, when injustices are prevalent among the people, when a word of hope is needed, let us pray that all can see Christ in us – for that is our calling: to be imitators, and not impersonators, of Christ. NOW GO IN PEACE.