I’d like to begin with a word of explanation. Pastor Karl chose the text for today’s message, but he never got his sermon written. If he had, we could have read it to you. But since he didn’t it has fallen to me to come up with a sermon for you. I’m filling in at the Clinton Church on Sundays at 11:00 a.m. while their pastor is on her maternity leave. She asked me to preach my sermons there based on the passages of Scripture they are reading as they, too, are reading the Bible through this year. So instead of writing one sermon, I felt a need to write two, one for the people at Clinton, and this one, which Louise, bless her heart, has agreed to read to the congregation at the eleven o’clock service.

Karl’s sermon title was “Of One Mind,” based on the words the Apostle Paul writes to the believers in Philippi. It is that theme I’d like us to reflect on this morning. And the logical place to begin is with that word ‘mind’ and what the Apostle means by it. The Greek word he uses has primarily to do with thinking and with everything we might wrap up in the phrase, ‘thought processes.’ It has to do with how we make sense of the experiences which come to us -- the values we place on those experiences and the part they play in helping us understand the world we live in and the situations we face as we move through life from day to day. The word has to do with how we go about thinking things through.

But more than that, when Paul uses this word, he intends to include not only our thought processes, but the objects of our thoughts. That term, ‘mind’ is intended to represent what you and I think about. So he can write to the Colossian believers and tell them to ‘set their minds on things above.’ For Paul our minds are made up of the things we think about, and, at a deeper level, those things which motivate us to act the way we do, especially in our relationships with one another. The Apostle uses the word mind because he knows there is a direct link between those things we spend our time thinking about and the way we live our lives. Which is why our minds are so important when it comes to living for Christ.

The Holy Spirit uses Paul to tell the Philippian believers, and you and me, that we are to have one mind among us. I think it is important for us to realize that what God has in mind for us when Paul uses the term ‘one’ is not uniformity, but unity. If we all had the same thoughts about everything nothing creative or new would ever come into being. Everything would always stay the same. The one mind the Apostle is calling us to have is a sense of commonality about the way we go about our thinking. He is calling us to a sense of unity when it comes to where we focus our attention and the things which consume our thoughts and fill our minds. Such oneness is essential for the health and well-being of the Church.

It is essential for us to take note of the basis on which our one mind is to be developed. Paul begins, “If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ…” The primary basis for having a common mindset among believers is the fact that we are all united to Jesus. How we have come to that experience isn’t important. We may have grown up in the faith and never known a time when Jesus wasn’t part of our lives. We may have had a dramatic conversion experience. It really doesn’t matter how we came into our union with Christ. But our common mindset rests on the fact that we all belong to Jesus. We know the same Lord and He knows us, and in the common experience of our relationship with Him we are made one.

Paul goes on to write, “If there is any comfort or consolation in His love…” That, too, is part of the foundation on which our ‘one mind’ rests. One of the great realities of the Christian life is that we are loved by our heavenly Father, and that nothing can ever separate us from that love because Jesus Christ has claimed us as His own. When we falter and fall, when life is hard and even painful what a comfort it is to know that we are loved with an everlasting love. And more than that, to know that that same truth is true for all our sisters and brothers in Christ. We share in a common love which none of us could ever deserve or earn, and that love gives us a common way of thinking about life and ourselves.
The third basis for our common mindset is our common sharing in the Spirit. Everyone who receives Jesus as Savior and Lord receives the Holy Spirit in that same moment. He is the Spirit of Jesus, and He comes to live in the hearts of all who believe. How we experience the presence of the Spirit in our lives may vary greatly. For some He comes in a tremendous rush of emotions. For others His coming is so imperceptible it can only be recognized by looking back over the things He has done in and through us. But again, having the same mind doesn’t depend on the how the Spirit comes, but the fact that He has come, that He is at work in each of our lives, and in His coming to us and living in us, we are made one.

The fourth thing Paul mentions as the basis for our being of one mind, is the tenderness and compassion which come from the Holy Spirit’s work within us, and our experience of that tenderness and compassion in our life together as the people of God. Part of our common experience is the tenderness and compassion of our Savior as He seeks to teach us how to be more like Him. He understands our weaknesses and the temptations we face. He is compassionate, He feels with us in our frailty and neediness. And when the Holy Spirit is empowering us to be the Body of Christ, when the Church is being the Church as it was meant to be, those qualities are mediated to us through the care and sympathy of our sisters and brothers in the Lord.

In verses 6 through 11 the Apostle describes what the one mind we are to share looks like. He writes, “Let this mind be in you which you have in Christ Jesus,” or as it is translated in the New International Version: “In your relationships with one another have the same mindset as Christ Jesus...” And at that point many students of the Scriptures think that Paul begins to quote a verse from one of the first hymns of the Early Church. It is a great affirmation of who the Son of God is and of what He came to do. Through it the Holy Spirit truly gives us a glimpse into the mind and heart of our Savior, the one mind which He wants to take form in us, and direct the very nature of our life together as His people.

These words tell us that Jesus Christ, God the Son, the eternal Second Person of the Trinity, never considered His relationship with His Father as something to be exploited or used to His advantage. On the contrary, He emptied Himself, as the old Gospel chorus says, ‘of all save love,’ and made Himself nothing, by comparison to who and what He had always been. He humbled Himself by taking on our humanity and embracing the frailty and hardship of life in a fallen world. He opened Himself to hunger and thirst, to frustration and anger, to rejection and hatred, to pain and death. His is the mindset of love, a life lived without counting the cost, spending itself for others.

For this early hymn affirms that Jesus emptied Himself when He came to earth and took the form of a servant. And not just any servant. The Son of God took on the form of the Suffering Servant the Prophet Isaiah had foreseen centuries before. If our minds represent the things we focus our attention on, then the Gospels make it clear that our Savior’s focus, the things which filled His mind were the doing of His Father’s will and the meeting of the deepest needs of others. That meant feeding the hungry, healing the sick, delivering the oppressed, opening the eyes of the blind and raising the dead. It meant speaking the truth, even when others did not want to hear it and whatever the cost might be. For He came, first and foremost to do His heavenly Father’s will.

And that obedience led Him to the cross, and to His death for the sake of a dying world. He had been sent by His Father to seek and to save the lost. He did that by taking up our infirmities and carrying our sorrows, by being pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. The punishment which brings us peace was laid on Him, and by His wounds we are healed. In His death He bore the sins of many, and made intercession for us, the transgressors. The mindset of the Son of God is one of sacrificial service. It is a mind which has its focus on the will of God and the needs of a sinful humanity. It is the one mind to which we are all called in Him.

Interestingly enough, Paul tells us what the outcome of that one mind will be, even before He describes
that mind to us. So I want to return to the earlier verses of chapter two, and see what Paul says we can expect
when we share the mind of Christ. He writes that we will all have the same love. He doesn’t say that we will
all like each other, or that we will all agree. He says that we will all have the same love for one another. If we
have the mind of Christ we will love one another as He has loved us. Our love will be unconditional and
unending as His love is for us. We will care deeply about the ultimate wellbeing of our sisters and brothers in
Christ. We will care about their souls and their bodies. We will love them as Christ has loved us --
sacrificially, willingly emptying ourselves, and not counting the cost.

Paul goes on to say that when we share one mind we will be of ‘one accord.’ The Greek actually reads,
‘together in spirit.’ By that I think what the Apostle has in mind is that there will be a common underlying
motivation in all that the Philippian believers undertake to do as the Church of Jesus Christ. The harmony of
the congregation will be based on the fact that they are all agreed on seeking to discern and do the Lord’s will
together, and that His will must trump their personal desires or agendas. That is the essence of their having one
mind. It is what having the mind of Christ, the mind of an obedient servant is all about. Out of that common
desire comes the harmony and accord Paul longs to see in the Church.

He goes on to describe how that one mind will express itself in the life of the congregation. When
God’s people are of one mind, and that mind is the mind of Christ, selfish ambition and vain conceit find no
place and no way to cause division and strife. In their place comes the virtue of humility. Humility is the
quality our Lord displayed in His incarnation and throughout His ministry. Do not be misled, that humility is
not based on a lack of self-worth. On the contrary it grows out of the truth that as the adopted children of our
heavenly Father we are of infinite worth., that we are so precious to God that Jesus died for us. Like the Lord,
knowing who we are and what we’re worth enables us to engage in the humblest kinds of service, even foot
washing is not beneath us.

Instead, with the mind of Christ, the one mind we share in Him, we are called to consider others better
than ourselves and to look not only to our own interests, but also to look to the interests of others. Just as our
Lord spent His earthly ministry with His eyes open to the needs of those around Him, so we are called to be
always sensitive to the needs of others, especially our fellow members in the family of faith. One commentator
on this passage has also suggested that this verse is also a call to be attentive to the spiritual progress of others
so that we may learn from their experiences and apply what we have learned in order to grow and mature in our
own relationships with the Lord. In both cases humility and grace are required of us.

And so it would seem that the ultimate key for us if we hope to be of the one mind the Apostle Paul
describes in Philippians two and which Pastor Karl made the title of his sermon, is to fill our minds with
thoughts of Jesus and the life He came to earth to live for you and me. The better we get to know Him, and not
just know about Him, the more open we will be to allowing the Holy Spirit to get on with the life-transforming
work He longs to do in each of us. For He intends to renew our minds by giving us the minds of Christ
Himself. And as we think the Savior’s thoughts after Him and allow those thoughts to direct our lives and our
life together, we will find that we have become the faithful servant of our Lord. So let us be of one mind: that
together we will seek as a congregation and as individuals to know Christ and to make Him known. Amen.