

Same Mind, Same Love
Philippians 2:1-13
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Northminster Presbyterian Church
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Yesterday, the Right Honorable Rev. Melissa Skelton was named the 12th Archbishop of the Anglican Church of Canada. That's the good news.

On Wednesday of this week, the United Methodist Bishop's announced the results of the votes on constitutional amendments passed at their 2016 General Conference (sort of like our General Assembly). Of the five amendments approved two summers ago, only two failed. The first stated that women were of equal value in God's eyes and the church should seek to eliminate discrimination. The second one that failed would have added "gender" to the list of membership characteristics that should not be an impediment to full participation in the church and public life. Both amendments received more than a majority, but not the 2/3 required to change the Methodist Constitution.

Simultaneously, Paige Patterson, one of the senior officials in the Southern Baptist Convention, is under fire for recordings that recently surfaced about his advice to a woman living in an abusive marriage to go home and pray for her husband. When she returned to him with two black eyes asking if he was happy, he told her he was because her husband had returned to church for the first time that Sunday.

It is not my intent today to shame the Methodist Church, or to slam the tradition in which I came to faith. I believe they reflect symptoms of a moral problem that goes much deeper than more conservative religious contexts.

I keep a calendar of historic events that happen in particular months, and one of the events for May caught my eye this week. On May 23rd, 2014, Elliot Rodger, a 22-year-old college student in a suburb of Santa Barbara, posted a rambling video online that he called Retribution. It was not the first video he had posted where he expressed his dissatisfaction with his life and the fact that most women seemed to ignore him or reject his advances. At the same time, he sent an email to his parents, his psychiatrist and a few friends that was called his "manifesto." These were different than anything he had done or said before.

In the video, he said: "Humanity is a disgusting, wretched, depraved species...If I had it in my power I would stop at nothing to reduce every single one of you to mountains of skulls and rivers of blood and rightfully so. You deserve to be annihilated and I will give that to you. You never showed me any mercy, so I will show you none."

In his manifesto, most of which has never been released to the public, he says, "The popular kids, you never accepted me and now you will all pay for it. Girls, all I ever wanted was to love you, be loved by you. I wanted a girlfriend. I wanted sex, love, affection, adoration."

He then went on a killing spree, stabbing or shooting more than a dozen people, hitting two with his car — in all killing six people and himself. In the days that followed the tragedy in Isla

Vista, a number of women publicly noted that if you took away the violence, what Mr. Rodger said in the videos and in his manifesto was shockingly similar to things they have heard for years — that young men view women as objects created for their pleasure, view other men only as rivals, and women as creatures who owe them subservience, love and gratification.

I have to admit that I remember being shocked four years ago. Maybe it was because I was raised differently by thoughtful and strong women and men; maybe it's because I'm gay and I never grew up viewing women as conquests, but I was shocked at the conversation that followed. A group of well-intended men got on Twitter and other social media and said, "He is not like us." But some did not distance themselves from his view of women, just his use of violence.

Many women then took to social media establishing the hashtag #YesAllWomen, giving women young and old across the nation a chance to speak up about ways in which they have been harassed, belittled, objectified and treated as "less than" by men or had witnessed men expressing views similar to those Mr. Rodger expressed. It exposed a surprising divide in our culture that events of the past four years have escalated.

Followers of Mr. Rodger emerged as a part of the so-called "incel" movement, dwelling in the largely anonymous corners of the internet — "in cel" for involuntary celibacy, a group of men asserting their anger and hatred and violent misogyny. One of those followers was the perpetrator of the van attack in Toronto three weeks ago that killed 10 and injured 16 more.

We are in the midst of a long-standing conflict, a conflict between those who view women as autonomous beings, who bring the same power, agency and importance into society and our common life together — whether it be economic, political, romantic or sexual — and those who view women as "less than," as objects. They are the victim-blamers who, mostly under their breath, say rape victims are "asking for it" or those who call women "teases" or a host of more sickening pejorative terms that men use for women who will not "give them what they want."

That conflict has erupted again in the last year with the #MeToo, #TimesUp, and #NeverAgain movements decrying widespread sexual harassment and discrimination against women in the entertainment industry and the professional and social world at large.

The Apostle Paul was writing to a Philippi that was dealing with a number of potential divisions, the greatest of which was those who said there were two types of followers of the WAY — those who were born Jewish or became Jews and became followers of Christ; and those who became followers of Christ without first becoming Jews in practice and circumcision.

Those fomenting division said that latter group was "less than" — not really true followers of the way, sort of like those people who seem to think women are not quite as human, not quite as important as men. Paul said, "e of the same mind, have the same love." And he wasn't saying "think the same thing or always agree. "But I do think he was saying, "Seek the mind of

Christ and find your unity in that." And the Mind of Christ is revealed in the Christ hymn that he then repeats.

Some scholars have suggested that his hymn was possibly very common in the Philippian church, sort of like *Amazing Grace* or *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*, and they suggest he doesn't include the hymn to assert who Jesus is because the people already know that, but to remind the people who they should seek to be like, the heart they should seek to have in common with Christ.

And what does he say about the mind of Christ, the love of Christ? That it is not turned inward; that it doesn't look at other people and say, "what do they owe me" or "who are they for me," but rather "how can I be of aid to them." "Where do my gifts meet their needs?" It is inherently not selfish, inherently NOT narcissistic.

And here is where I think the rubber meets the road with the events surrounding these recent events, which seem to deny women their fully humanity, their full creation in the image of God. I firmly believe that from that car attack four years ago to the one last month, from Harvey Weinstein's hotel rooms in Hollywood to demeaning comments and actions made by men in the highest political and commercial offices in this land, there is a cancer growing in our culture, a cancer of separation, of otherness, of narcissism and sexism and entitlement, a cancer some pundits are calling a response to "endangered entitlement."

We like to think we've gone beyond this. We like to think that our educated culture really has come around to viewing women as equal and on paper and in many of the lives reflected in this very room there have been incredible advances. But the current backlash presents a real threat to the unity of the human family here in this country, a real threat to the idea that we can be of the same mind about one another, about rights and liberties and dignity and respect, both in the social and political sphere and the spiritual one as well.

It presents a real threat to the idea that we can have the same love, a love that is less concerned about what I want and more concerned about what the community needs — or what those who are most vulnerable need, or even what our beloveds need — more than what we need.

Paul confronts the threat of division, the threat that the people will not be of one mind, by reciting for them a song of Christ's love, reminding them whose they are, where they find their unity. Perhaps it is time for us to do the same in this culture — for people of faith to step up not simply to condemn heinous acts by misogynist leaders or domestic terrorists but also to speak out and confront the culture. We say that all of humanity is created in God's image. We have learned from our transgender, intersex and asexual fellow children of God that the very binary toxic masculinity seeks to cling to is not reflective of God's great diversity.

Don't we as people of faith, as those who seek to have the mind of Christ, who claimed ALL he met as a part of his family, who respected the dignity and dreams of the rich and the poor, the healthy and the sick, the men and the women; don't we have an obligation to live that

truth and to confront a culture that demeans anyone, that makes an “other” of women, or foreigners, or the poor, or the trans teen, the single mother, or even the sick or mentally ill?

If it is true that we are one — and if the Christ we follow has good news of God’s love and grace for all of God’s children, and if Paul is also right when he declares that in Christ there is no longer slave nor free, no longer Jew nor Gentile, no longer male and female — then we must show and teach our boys better respect for women, and show and teach our girls self-respect, and then stand up with them when they assert those values.

And why? Because we know the joy of living lives centered in, as Paul puts it today, compassion and sympathy which are the marks of the mind of Christ. Compassion that never allows love of self to dominate love for God and for others. Sympathy — in the Greek word here it’s about both oneness and connecting to the other’s perspective.

We are drawn into community in the loving sacrifice and victorious triumph of Jesus Christ. Does this make us better than anyone else? Of course not. But it does give us a perspective to be sensitive to the woundedness of those who have no community, to see the sickness of dividing God’s children into earthly categories like the haves and the have nots, the pretty and the plain, the righteous and the sinner, the man and the woman. We who are one in Christ strive to live into our understanding of one mind, one love. Can we let our love be more visible? Can we be bold in our assertions of the oneness of the human family, reaching across racial and theological and economic and political and gender and so many other barriers that the culture uses to slice and dice us? Can we raise up young people who respect one another, who are open to love, but do not demand of the world and its occupants that it meet their needs, but instead strive for the good of all, building relationships not based on exploitation but on love and grace and mutuality?

Perhaps this is our great test as a culture and as a church. Can we live what we believe, not imposing our will on others, but letting our actions and our words reveal the goodness, the joy, the peace, the sense of belonging that our oneness in Christ can give us? Paul says we can. The church at Philippi was a testament to it, a church who’s only named leaders here and in the book of Acts are women.

On a day when much of the nation celebrates only one aspect of womanhood, mothering, and without denigrating that role, perhaps a better path for our worship would be to give thanks for all women, for all the ways in which our understanding of God is enriched by the more than three and half billion people worldwide who are not cisgender men, and to affirm that that half of the world’s population is as equally made in God’s image as anyone else, and to recommit ourselves to be followers of a Christ who broke down barriers to our understanding of the full humanity of all God’s children, a Christ whose first word spoken after his resurrection was “woman.”

May God, in her wisdom and guidance, make it so. Amen.