

Sermons at Christ Church

Lord, Make Me an Instrument of Your Peace.

Palm Sunday

The Reverend Emmanuel Ato Mercer

Let the same mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus. Paul charges the Philippians. The same mind. Not a slightly different mind but the same mind. I wonder what kind of mind is in Christ Jesus. But my wonderings shouldn't be that deep because I believe that the mind of Christ is soaked so deep in humility. A virtue which to me is the mother of all virtues.

This past week has been tough for everyone for many reasons. But two reasons that readily come to mind are: one, for the first time in our nation's history, a former president has been indicted. Two, the massacre at the Covenant School, in Nashville, TN.

This past Friday I had a conversation with a woman who is in her eighties. She lamented over the two issues that I just named. She wonders why our society seems to be sinking ever so slowly, inch by inch into the abyss of chaos, disorder, violence and fear.

Many are those of her age who tend to believe that in spite of the many advances that we have made as a society, their grandchildren would be dealing with a different set of challenges for which they are not prepared for. She is part of the generation who believe that their grandchildren may not be able to live the kind of life that they have lived.

My response to her wonderings may have been something I have not thought much about. I said in my response that the church hasn't been perfect. There have been many wrongs that has taken place in the church and for which the church is responsible. But the church happens to be the only place I know that teaches people about love, compassion, gratitude and humility-the mother of all virtues.

The church happens to be the only place where as the prophet Isaiah says, we have been given the tongue of a teacher to sustain the weary with a word. The church happens to be the only place I know that grounds people in morality, a place that supports and nurtures children to grow to be responsible adults. In fact, the church happens to be the only place I know that grounds people in the mind of Christ.

The issue really is, we expect people to be moral, we expect people to act right, we expect people to display the mind of Christ when those people do not have any idea or grounding in what it means to act right or to have the mind of Christ. We expect people to act responsible when those people do not know the benefits of acting responsible. We expect people to be grateful for the gifts we share with them when those people do not know what it means to be grateful or have never lived grateful lives.

When I served as a Youth Minister in Columbia, SC, we partnered with an organization which repaired the homes of old and poor homeowners who lived on social security.

On one Saturday blitz, whiles we worked on a house, we saw an able bodied man who lived in that house. As we worked, this gentleman, took his shower, dressed up, sat in his car and drove off and did not return until we left in the afternoon.

Some of the youth who witnessed this behavior of a man who lived in the house on which they were working. A man who didn't join in fixing his own home. A man who didn't even have the joy to say thank you to those who were working on the house in which he lived. Some of the youth asked me *Fr. Manny, how come this man didn't help or even say thank you?*

Many of you know that I like to talk but that was one moment where I didn't have the words to explain to these young people why the man acted the way he did. Let that same mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus.

These young people didn't know the man from Adam, but they knew that something didn't add up. They knew that something about the picture was terribly wrong. That if they have left the comfort of their homes to fix the home of a man who didn't even appreciate their effort, then why are they working on this house? But the true gift is, if you have the mind of Christ, you always remind yourself that it isn't about you, it is about the joy you find in expressing the love of Christ. If you have the mind of Christ, you are keenly aware that ministry isn't about you, it is about the value you find in having the same mind that was in Christ Jesus.

If you have the mind of Christ, you always remind yourself that salvation isn't about you or anyone particular person. Jesus didn't even consider that salvation was about him, he saw himself as a means to an end and not an end in itself. That is why although he was in the form of God, he didn't count equality with God as something to be exploited but humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even death on the cross.

The idea of Palm Sunday marking Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem speaks not only of the triumph of humility, but it speaks of the triumph of self-emptying-two virtues that are so missing in our society. I hear Jesus remind us "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled and whoever humbles himself will be exalted"

And so today, I watch with anguish as I see Jesus climb on the donkey and ride into Jerusalem-not as a hero but as a sacrificial lamb. I wonder how he walked into the lion's den. I don't even want to go near the lion's pen at the zoo because I think they might break free.

I see people just like you and I throw their garments on the way for the man who didn't own anything to ride on their garments sitting on a donkey. I see many people, just like you and I pull branches of trees and with joy shout hosanna to the Son of David.

But as I savor this moment, I also see many people, just like you and I who would be shouting crucify him-laying bare the disunity and contrasting allegiances that plague and damages us, our communities and our world and I wonder, how do we get through all of this stuff.

I may not have the answers to all my wonderings this morning but one thing I know is that it is here in the church that we learn that those who have the mind of Christ recognize divisions for what they are but they are not driven by those divisions. It is here that we learn that those who have the mind of Christ recognize hatred for what it is but they are not consumed by it. It is here in the church that we learn that those who have the mind of Christ recognize pride for what it is but they are not defined by it.

Those who have the mind of Christ, walk even into the lion's den with all humility and grace and are never afraid of the lion because the God who calls them to walk into the lion's den is trustworthy. It is this God, only this God who vindicates those who have the mind of Christ. Amen.