

Having the Mind of Christ

Introduction

Some years ago when Greg Anderson was still our pastor he said, in the course of one of his sermons, that he would encourage anyone who wanted to, to preach a sermon on “the mind of Christ” – what is it? So this morning I am going to take up the challenge and talk about having the mind of Christ. This is something Paul the Apostle told the Corinthian Christians that they had (1 Cor. 2:16), and which he encouraged the Philippian Christians to have (Phil. 2: 5), in the scripture passage that Daniel just read for us.

In order to talk about having the mind of Christ we first must consider what the mind is. “Scientists insist on talking about the brain while the rest of us talk about the mind.” (Sharon Bigley July 24 2018 in *Science*) We all know where our brain is, right? I’m going to ask the children, those here in the church this morning and those watching this service at home, to point to where your brain is located. Your parents can do this too if they want to. Depending on how old you are, you can also probably draw a pretty good picture of the shape of the brain.

We know our brain is located in our head and that our brain enables us to think and see and do things with the rest of our body, our hands and our feet. The Canadian Oxford dictionary defines the brain as “an organ of soft nervous tissue contained in the skull of vertebrates [animals with backbones], functioning as the coordinating centre of sensation, and of intellectual and nervous activity.”

Okay, now point to where your mind is located. That’s not so easy is it? So what about our mind? Where is it located and what does it do?

The same dictionary defines the mind as “the seat of consciousness, awareness, thought, volition and feeling.”

It would not be easy to draw a picture of the mind. But we could draw a picture of what our minds make us do, like bringing our mothers a bouquet of wild flowers to show them that we love them. (In some ways the mind is like the wind, we can’t see it but we can see what it does.)

The debate about the differences between the brain and the mind and whether they are one and the same thing, as neuroscientists who study the brain insist, or whether they are altogether separate entities like most of the rest of us think, is going to go on for a long time. So, for the purposes of our discussion this morning,

we will accept that “the mind” is separate from “the brain.” And we will accept that the mind is responsible for “consciousness, awareness, thought, volition, and feeling.”

Consciousness allows us to be aware that we exist, and that others exist around us. A French philosopher said “I think, therefore I am.”

Awareness allows us to have knowledge of our surroundings along with a whole lot else.

Thinking allows us to take in information, to turn it over in our minds, to decide what to do with that information, to say what we think about something, and so on. Creativity, making things, results from thinking. Our thinking also affects who we are as a person. “As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.” (Prov. 23: 7)

Our minds can move us to action, to will to do something, based on the information we have received.

Feeling is different than thinking (although our feelings affect our thinking). Feeling allows us to be sensitive to other people, both how their circumstances and their words and actions affect us, and how they make us feel.

I think most of us have a good understanding of what the mind is and how it functions.

What is the mind of Christ?

With that as background, let us consider the mind of Christ. What is the mind of Christ? If the human mind is capable of all these things – consciousness, awareness, thought, willful action and feeling – how much more must the mind of Christ be capable of.

In the first few verses of the gospel of John (John 1:1-5) we learn that Christ Jesus, the Word, brought all things into existence, created all that is, including us, by thinking about it and forming it with his words. Christ’s mind, based on the example of Creation, is awe-inspiring. “In the beginning, God – and Christ was and is one with God the Father – created the heaven and the earth.” (Gen. 1:1)

The New Testament gives us considerable insight into the mind of Christ while he was here on earth as a human. We can learn a lot about someone from the way they behave and from what they say, from the feelings that they express.

Luke says of the child Jesus (2:40) “And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom.” Usually we think of wisdom as being something that older people have, that it comes from a combination of experience and knowledge. My older brother likes to say that “Wisdom comes with age, but sometimes age comes by itself.” But Christ, at a very young age, had wisdom, for “The favour of God was upon him.” “Even a child is known by his actions.” (Prov. 20:11)

We know that even as a child Jesus was a thinker, a questioner; he had an active mind. When he went with his parents to the temple in Jerusalem when he was twelve years old, he stayed behind to sit with the teachers, listening to them and asking questions. And they were amazed at *his* understanding and *his* answers. (Luke 2: 46, 47) Luke also tells us that the boy Jesus was “submissive” to his parents, he was obedient, an attitude that results from accepting the circumstances in which he found himself. Luke’s gospel also says that “Jesus *increased* in wisdom and in stature [or perhaps years] and in favour with God and man.” (Luke 2: 51, 52) His increase in wisdom would have resulted from his being conscious, being aware of what was going on around him, from learning.

I won’t consider all of the examples in the gospel accounts that give us some insight into the mind of Christ but we know that he exercised “volition”, he acted willfully and willingly. In the situation where he healed the leper who said to him, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean. And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying ‘I will. Be clean.’” Christ demonstrated compassion and his willingness to help this leper. He was not concerned about possibly getting leprosy himself, which people at the time thought was contagious, but touched him and healed him. (Matt. 8: 1 – 4)

We have the wonderful example of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew (5, 6, 7) where Christ taught what he knew, what he had learned, both from study because of the way he references Old Testament teaching, and from what he had observed. This sermon has always been a favourite of mine – Christ giving us good basic guidance and direction as to how we should conduct our lives. It seems to me to be a distillation, a boiled down version, all the good stuff, that he wanted people to know. Christ had obviously thought through what he wanted to say to these people who had come to hear him teach.

Christ accepted the outcast, another act of volition or will. By willingly going to the house of Zacchaeus, a despised tax collector who worked for the oppressive

Roman government, Christ also demonstrated his care and concern for the salvation of “one of the least of these...” (Luke 19: 1-9)

We know that Christ experienced feelings of sorrow, as demonstrated by his weeping over Jerusalem. (Luke 19: 41 – 44).

We know that Christ “loved us and gave himself for us” (Eph. 5: 2) and that God, and therefore Christ, is love. (1 John 4: 8). However, we also have examples of Christ as a man experiencing the feeling of love. He loved the rich young ruler whose wealth prevented him from following Christ. (Mark 10: 21) Jesus loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus. It was also obvious to others that Christ loved his friend Lazarus. “See how he loved him.” (John 11: 36) Love is a feeling that comes from our minds and hearts.

In Mark’s account of Jesus blessing the little children, we learn that he felt “indignant” that his disciples were trying to prevent the parents from bringing the children to him. (Mark 10:14)

We know that on several occasions Christ felt compassion for people: the widow whose only son had died (Luke 7:13); the crowd which met him on the lakeshore and whose sick he healed (Matt. 14: 14); the large crowd who had come to hear him and were hungry (Matt. 15: 32); as well as other examples.

Sometimes Jesus’ actions appear to portray anger, as in his chasing the money changers out of the temple in Jerusalem, but I know of only one instance in the gospels where it says he was angry. That is the time he healed the withered hand of a man in the synagogue in Capernaum on the Sabbath. He was angered by the hardness of heart of the Pharisees present that day. (Mark 3: 1 – 6)

So the mind of Christ includes these many attributes, as well as many more.

You Have the Mind of Christ

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians, asking “For who has understood the mind of the Lord, so as to instruct him? But we [believers in Christ] have the mind of Christ.” (1 Cor. 2:16)

Now let’s look specifically at Philippians 2: 1 – 11.

As Paul appealed to the Corinthians “...that you all agree...” and to “...be united in the same mind...” (1 Cor. 1: 10) so he also asked the Philippians to “complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and

of one mind.” The “one mind” Paul wanted them to have is “[ours] in Christ Jesus.”

I have suggested over the last little while here what the attributes were that the gospel writers tell us that Christ’s mind held, based on what he felt and what he did and said and how he acted. In these verses from Paul’s letter to the Philippians he goes into some detail as to probably the most significant attribute of the mind of Christ, which was humility.

I will read verses 5 through 11 again:

“⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

⁶ Who, being in very nature God,
 did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
⁷ rather, he made himself nothing
 by taking the very nature of a servant,
 being made in human likeness.
⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
 he humbled himself
 by becoming obedient to death—
 even death on a cross!
⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
 and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
 in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
 to the glory of God the Father.”

Prior to coming to coming to our Earth, to be born as a human baby, Jesus was “in the form of God”, in very nature, God. He existed as one with God (John 1: 1 – 3). He was equal to God and shared his glory (John 17:5) before the world existed.

But Jesus “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped”, something he had to cling to. Christ clearly demonstrated a lack of selfish ambition or conceit. Christ made himself, in comparison to what he was, as nothing, taking on the form of a servant. He came to be the foster son of a carpenter. He came as a man so he could experience life as ordinary people, like you and me, live it.

He humbled himself, obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Crucifixion was an excruciatingly painful way to die (in fact, that is where that word “excruciating” comes from). Those who are executed in this way Deuteronomy (21:23) tells us are cursed by God, so Christ bore the curse of sin for us (Gal. 3: 12 – 14).

During his ministry Christ said, “Greater love has no man than this that he lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13) He also said, “You are my friends if you do what I command you.” (John 15:14) So we understand from all this that Christ gave up his Godly glory to come to earth as a man to die for us, his friends.

Here we have laid out for us in these verses from Philippians the wonderful example of the mind of Christ, where he demonstrates extreme humility and profound love. And the apostle Paul says, “you have the mind of Christ.”

How do we demonstrate the mind of Christ?

Since we then have the mind of Christ, how do we demonstrate it? How do we show that we, individually and altogether in unity, have the mind of Christ?

The mind of Christ showed love in many ways, by healing, by blessing, by praying for his followers, by teaching. Let us look for ways to follow his example. As Christians we have been given gifts, talents, abilities. Let us use those God-given capabilities in a loving way to help those with whom we come into contact. Each of us has unique gifts that we can use to demonstrate God’s love. Christ said, “By this will everyone know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13: 35). We can also show God’s love to others beyond our family of faith in various ways.

The mind of Christ demonstrates compassion and caring for others. During this pandemic period I know that some of you are being compassionate and caring for others by checking in on others in our congregation, by calling them to see how they are doing, to see if you can help them in some way. I encourage all of us to do more of this, so that we can maintain our fellowship and strengthen our church family by doing so.

We can also demonstrate our compassion beyond our church family and our local community by supporting missionaries, those who have gone out from our church congregation as well as others, and by giving to the organizations which are

working to ease the economic suffering of those who have lost their jobs because of COVID – 19.

The mind of Christ was indignant, when he saw things that upset him, as the example of children being prevented from having access to him. Indignation may not at first appear like a positive attribute but it can be if it results in right action being taken. We should be indignant, I think, even angry, sometimes about injustices that we see in society. We have a responsibility as Christians to love our neighbours as ourselves and that may sometimes mean supporting those who are being unfairly treated. When people do not have access to basic freedoms and services we should be moved to act on their behalf, whether by prevailing upon elected officials to do what needs to be done for such as these, or by acting on our own. We should, of course, always “speak the truth in love.” (Eph. 4:15)

The mind of Christ was thoughtful, as demonstrated by his teaching. We can be Christ-like in our thinking. We have Paul’s outline of what we should think about, also in the letter to the Philippians (4:8), where he says, “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things.”

And finally, humility. We should demonstrate the mind of Christ in this attribute, following the example he set us. We will never be called to demonstrate the level of humility that Christ showed, it is impossible. However, we need to examine ourselves. Do we consider our “standing” or our “station” in our profession or our field of work or expertise as something of which to be proud? Paul in his letter to the Romans (12:3) says that we should not “... think of [ourselves] more highly than [we] ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.” I think we can apply this to our work or personal situations as well as to our faith.

Our society and culture encourages us to value ourselves, but do we do that to the disadvantage of others? Do we consider ourselves to be more important than others, our position, whatever it may be, something to be preserved at all costs? If we do, then are we truly having the mind of Christ?

Conclusion

I think most of us understand that our minds, guided by the Holy Spirit who lives within us, can help us to be Christ-like in our thoughts, behaviour and action. We

have the examples in the New Testament of what the mind of Christ was like, and there are many more examples than the few that I mentioned today. I encourage you to study the gospels for your selves to understand better what the mind of Christ was like and therefore what our minds, since we have the mind of Christ, should be like.

May God bless us all as we seek to gain and demonstrate the mind of Christ together.

Thank you for your attention.

Benediction

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Col. 3: 1 – 4)