

Sermon for Sunday October 1, 2023 Phil 2:1-13

We talked a good bit in our all-congregation conversation last week about seeking to do God's will in our search process, and listening for the Holy Spirit. That is a wise thing anytime, but particularly in this season when we are seeking our next Rector.

And then along comes this beautiful passage from Paul's letter to the Christ-followers at Philippi, where Paul says it so much better than any of us can:

“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 yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”

I doubt that any person in this parish would argue from a position of selfish ambition or deceit, but we surely do have opinions. Opinions are how we are wired as human beings, but having an opinion that insists that no other opinion can have merit is where we might get into trouble.

I saw that in play when I posted a picture on FaceBook of the downed WWI doughboy memorial out on the street nearby. I did this on the day after it happened, before we knew much about what caused it to be toppled. It was evident to me that it was likely a car smashing into it, since it took a lot of force to do the damage that was done and the speed limit sign was squished down. I heard that there had been a shooting in the neighborhood overnight, and I wondered if it had been related.

Because it was FaceBook, and because there are folks who share an opinion in a nanosecond without giving things much thought, there were comments. One thought it was disrespectful to those who were memorialized by that monument, which would be true if it were a deliberate act. Another thought it was a deliberate attack on the monument based on the attacker not knowing the difference between a Confederate memorial and one to World War I. In both cases, I said it was unlikely that was the cause.

What we all later learned was that an individual in an SUV was being pursued by a person in another vehicle. The latter person was shooting at the first vehicle, and one of those bullets hit the first person, causing him to lose control of the vehicle and plow into the memorial as he was dying. It was a tragedy for the person who was shot. It was a tragedy for their family. It was a tragedy for all who

were involved, even the shooter, whose choice will most likely lead to incarceration and whose family will grieve as well.

Perhaps I was wrong, to post the picture of the memorial on the ground in the first place. It certainly wasn't right for others to make snarky assumptions about what happened. But the lesson here is that when we make assumptions about motivation, assumptions about what happened, assumptions about a group of people or a town or a nation, bad things happen.

Much of what we suffered when this parish was in conflict was related to unfounded assumptions, when it would have been so easy to ask a question, to clarify decisions and meanings and such.

So what Paul is telling his beloved people in Philippi is the same thing I remind you: let us be of one mind in this process of seeking the next rector. Let us consider the needs of all, not just our own desires. Let us listen for God's will, and all the possibilities God sets before us. Let us trust that if we pray and if we listen for the whisper of the Holy Spirit, we will hear what we need to know.

It's a hard thing, finding that place of letting go of control and trusting God. We are all victims of our own desires, especially the desire to feel in control. But I'm reminded of the fact that when I've been most at sea, when I've felt lost and frightened and alone, if I simply prayed and trusted that God would help, God did. Plain and simple. Sometimes it was a trusted friend who comforted me, sometimes it was a professional who counseled me, sometimes it was simply feeling God's presence surrounding me.

As always, the fear that accompanied my desire to be in control abated when I ceded control to God. So in this thing that we do together, with the search committee doing its wonderful and prayerful work and with the Vestry supporting that work, if we all seek God's support in whatever form it arrives, this will be a fruitful search, because God knows what we need.

God knows. Repeat it with me: "God knows."

Keep repeating that anytime that urge to press, to assert control, to opine without information, to make assumptions.

Because we don't have to know everything. Because God already knows, and God will accompany us in this time. And aren't we blessed by that?

Amen.