

LIVING JESUS: Let This Mind Be in You

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Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus...

—Philippians 2:5 NRSV

I will begin by confessing my sense of inadequacy to write this article. My mind largely is not the mind of Christ. Occasionally, I have moments of awareness when I sense a holy alignment with the indwelling presence of Christ and act from that deeper center in ways that make God's peaceable kin-dom feel a little nearer to reality. But usually, I join Shirley Erena Murray in pleading:

Take the tangle of my thought, take the tension from my frame,
free within me what is fraught, still the waves I cannot tame.

—Community of Christ Sings, 161, "In the Quiet of This Day"

Yet, even when I feel my own thoughts and behaviors could not be further from the call of Christ within, I long to be formed more completely in the image of the peaceful One. I write this exploration from that longing.

Perhaps this is the essential place to begin an exploration of putting on the mind of Christ in our own complex time. The language of "putting on" the mind of Christ may sound daunting and difficult, but its roots are desire. As St. Thérèse of Lisieux observed, "Jesus has not impressed this hunger in your heart for nothing."

Putting on the mind of Christ is not exact imitation of Jesus. It is to turn our hearts in the same direction Christ turned his, to discover our truest selves in God, and to live fully our interdependence with all creation to bring peace, justice, wholeness, and shalom.

M. Robert Mulholland Jr. powerfully articulates this invitation in *The Deeper Journey: The Spirituality of Discovering Your True Self*:

To do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus is to live our life in the world from a deep center of abiding in God...It should be obvious by now that putting on the new nature is far more radical than attitude adjustments and behavior modifications. The life hidden with Christ in God is one of such growing union with God in love that God's presence becomes the context of our daily life, God's purposes become the matrix of our activities, and the values of God's kingdom shape our life and relationships; God's living presence becomes the ground of our identity, the source of our meaning, the seat of our value and the center of our purpose.

The guiding question before the church—Are we moving toward Jesus the peaceful One?—is an example of a daily practice that invites us to "put on the mind of Christ" in every circumstance. It is an invitation to metamorphosis (January Herald, President Stephen M. Veazey), not just to "attitude adjustments and behavior modifications," but to a whole-being transformation that causes us to see everything from a changed perspective.

As I've talked with others around the church about the powerful image of metamorphosis, I've noticed that it usually has more to do with changes in church structure and program than an interior change. A change of heart is necessary for meaningful and authentic outward change. The church structure, form, or organization that the future unfolds will reflect what is actually within us. Whatever the

future might look like, the heart of the church must be communities of people being formed together in Christ for the sake of the world.

As congregations strain to discern God’s vision, we sometimes forget to look to our own hearts as the natural birthplace of whatever will be. Is metamorphosis happening in us? Is the hunger Jesus has impressed on our hearts leading to the kind of whole-being transformation that we yearn for, that the world yearns for?

This is what it means to be a spiritually formed community! It is to allow our whole selves—not just the parts we have reserved for religious life—to be formed continually in Christ. This leads naturally to compassionate action.

Spiritual Director Wil Hernandez reflects:

With solitude being the furnace of our inner transformation, a new converted self emerges from which real compassionate ministry freely flows...For we can only minister with a free heart of compassion out of a deeply transformed heart permeated by no less than God’s compassionate love. Our life then becomes a conduit of overflowing love.

—Henri Nouwen and *Spiritual Polarities: A Life in Tension*

We encounter the same invitation in *Doctrine and Covenants* Section 164:5:

By taking on the life and mind of Christ, you increasingly view yourselves and others from a changed perspective. Former ways of defining people by economic status, social class, sex, gender, or ethnicity no longer are primary. Through the gospel of Christ, a new community of tolerance, reconciliation, unity in diversity, and love is being born as a visible sign of the coming reign of God.

If this kind of transformation sounds overwhelming, well, it can be! Yet notice the vision for our world that is made real because of it! Is our deep desire for the peaceable kin-dom enough to motivate our ongoing transformation in Christ? Is the joy of what still is possible enough to confront everything within us that would keep us fearful and divided?

Putting on the mind of Christ, seeing the world through a Christ-lens, is not instantaneous, and it is not easy. It is more than spiritual platitudes; it is everyday compassion in action. It is a moment-to-moment choice. It is a gradual process of immense grace. It takes time and practice to attune to the thoughts, habits, attitudes, and assumptions that often unconsciously form our lives.

By putting on the mind of Christ, we gradually choose to bring to consciousness what has remained in the shadows. We gradually choose to discover who

we really are in God. We gradually choose to gather all the fragmented, compartmentalized, and weary parts of ourselves to “form our whole person toward an increasing conformity with the mind of Christ so that our way of praying and our way of believing will be one” (Henri Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart: Desert Spirituality and Contemporary Ministry*).

Sometimes it is not hard at all; rather beautiful, inspiring, and natural to whom we were created to be, drawing us closer to each other and God. Viewing ourselves and others through a gaze of unconditional mercy, possibility, sacredness, and intrinsic worth frees us from the tyranny of perfectionism and achievement. Taking on the mind of Christ means we live in compassion rather than competition, and we discover the courage to confront anything that diminishes the worth of another.

I still am aware of the “tangle of my thought” most of the time. But I also am keenly aware of the hunger impressed on my heart that urges me into deeper relationship with Jesus, the peaceful One. This is why it is a spiritual practice.

Every new circumstance is a new occasion to notice which mind is forming me. Though it may seem murky, uncertain, or challenging at first, steadfast commitment to putting on the mind of Christ in daily life gradually becomes more natural. It becomes our new habit, our new identity, and every new thing in the Spirit flows forth from this source.

