

A Sermon for Dayspring Baptist Church
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“Smelling Like Jesus”
1st in the series, *Becoming Like Christ*.
Philippians 2:1-14
7th Sunday of Easter
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Many of you know that my studies have been focused on both leadership and spiritual formation. What you may not know is that my own hunger for starting this program was oriented toward spiritual formation.

For a long time now I had a hunch that at the core of what the church is called to be and do in this world is the work of spiritual formation. And after studying it deeply, this conviction continues to grow in me.

Why and how we do what we do:

Whether it's missions, or worship, or justice work, or creating community, or Sunday school, or youth group, or Manna, or tithing... or building a new addition, you name it... at its core, underneath all that the church does, and influencing all that we do... is our spiritual formation.

Let that settle in for just a moment. That's a huge statement for me to make. In fact, I hope you're unsettled a little bit by it...or at least curious. Because it is a pretty big statement for me to make.

I'm going to spend the next several weeks unpacking that just a bit for all of us, because I want us as a church to really get this...

to understand what spiritual formation is and what it isn't,
and why it has to be at the very core of our life together,
influencing all that we're doing.

But before I do that, I want to tell you a story... a story about two leaders in a church that just couldn't get along. One was named Euodia and the other Syntycha. But those are kind of weird names, so we'll call them Evey and Sindy for short.

Now it didn't really seem to matter what was going on in the church. Evey and Sindy always seemed to be on opposite sides of things.

When it came to the ***Christian education committee***, Sindy thought they should be teaching the Bible more. Evey thought they should be dealing with the ethical questions of their day.

When they were both on ***the missions committee***, Sindy thought they should be doing more to care for their missionaries, like Paul. Evey, on the other hand got so frustrated that the church wasn't doing more right there in their own city, working for justice, taking care of the poor and the marginalized.

When it came to ***the worship committee***, Sindy wanted a longer sermon.

Evey wanted more music.

It didn't really matter what the topic was, they were at odds.

But don't get the wrong idea here. They were always so good intentioned. Everything they pushed came from a place of conviction. It always seemed like a good thing to them and their groupies. They'd even use Jesus' words to make their point.

But underneath it all there were some really unhealthy ego struggles going on. In fact, they were driven by things that **they didn't** even recognize.

Sure, what they said sounded like Jesus,
but weren't really the spirit of Jesus...

That can be subtle, but there is such a profound difference you know.

There is a profound difference between being driven by ideas and quotes from Jesus,
and being driven by the same spirit as Jesus.

Well, Paul has been hearing stories about Evey and Sindy and how they each have their own mind about just about everything. And it's creating all kinds of problems. In fact, without realizing it Evey and Sindy are doing more harm than good.

So Paul writes them a letter. Actually, he writes a letter to the whole church, but he's got Evey and Sindy in mind.

He doesn't name them until Chapter 4, but you can tell he's talking to them even in Chapter 2, in our reading this morning. "If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit of Christ...Be of the same mind, having the same love..." he writes. It's almost verbatim what he'll say to them directly in Chapter 4. "Evey and Sindy, I urge you, be of the same mind!" They are getting a little scolding here.

And I imagine when everyone in the church of Pilippi was gathered to hear Paul's letter read out loud to them, there were lots of chuckles when they got called out by name.

Or maybe they weren't chuckling at all. Maybe everyone there was a little bit uncomfortable because they've all been pulled into one camp or the other. They've all taken on either Evey's mind or Sindy's mind, and Paul's trying to help them see that they are all missing the point.

"Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus," Paul says.

Not the mind of Evey or the mind of Sindy.

For that matter, not the mind of a Baptist or the mind of a Catholic.

Not a conservative mind or a Liberal mind.

Not a Democratic mindset or a Republican mindset...

Shoot, it's not even the mind of an American

Or the mind of a Middle Easterner.

Nope.

Paul's quite clear about this. It's right there in verse 5 and it's one of the central themes of the New Testament. "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus," Paul writes. It's radically different.

So different that Paul goes on to quote what was one of the great hymns they sang most Sundays about the life of Jesus.

Scholars now call it the Kenosis hymn... a hymn about self-emptying:

*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a servant,
being born in human likeness.*

*And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross. [This great self-emptying]*

*Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

It's so poetic, we're pretty sure it was a hymn that was sung. What we know is that Paul is giving us a model here.

Jesus isn't just a sacrifice to get you off the hook for things you've done.

Jesus is a model for us, a paradigm to follow.

Jesus is a revealing of our true nature...

Jesus is revealing what it means to be fully human and made in the image of God.

He is both teacher and model.

Or as the ancient church put it, "He is both the way we must follow and the goal we must reach." (Augustine)

"Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus," Paul writes.

That's what we're aiming for.

That's the North Star, our guiding image.

It's like saying

let your way of seeing your life,

and seeing this world,

and understanding what's happening around you,

and interacting with everyone and everything around you

be shaped by the mind of Christ.

Let your desires and drives, your hopes and dreams,
be shaped by the mind of Christ.

Let your friendships and your romances,
your parenting and your work,
your struggles and suffering...

Let yourself enter it, understand it, interact with it, with a different mind than your own... "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus."
And it's not just something you decided overnight. It's formed in you over time.

That's what spiritual formation is all about, and why it's at the core, affecting everything we're doing as a church.

That's also how it is different from Evangelism, or missions, or discipleship, or even worship. Those things are about **what we do**, and **what we know** cognitively, and they are practices, **and they are important**.

But spiritual formation is about **who we are becoming**.

It's about what kind of mind is operating in the background of our life... and that's a very different thing.

And it's not just the ancients that are telling us this. We now know from science that most of our actions and our decisions day to day aren't driven by logic and what we know, but by the deep mysterious hidden milieu of our unconscious. We're driven much more by **who we have become** than by what we know.

Think of it this way: spiritual formation is a lot like the ongoing process of updating your computer every few years.

You know what it's like when your computer is a few years old, right? It freezes. You get the eternal spinning circle... It doesn't matter how much more data you put in it, it can't keep processing things you need it to. It has limitations. The data alone isn't enough.

And so we have to update the components of the computer and update the operating system. It's the only way that our computers can operate in a dynamically different way. Data alone doesn't do it.

In a way, spiritual formation is the ongoing journey of updating our computer. It's the never-ending journey of operating from a different mind.

Simply put:

"Spiritual formation is the on-going journey of becoming like Christ."

It's that simple.

And at the same time, it's that hard:

It is on-going. We never arrive.

But we are always becoming...

We have so far to go.

And so the aim of our life together is to help and guide one another along the way. It isn't to become a people who **just know** what Jesus would do or what God would want us to do, or to know right and wrong. Yes, they are important.

But our deeper aim is to become people, who naturally do the things Jesus would do, in the way Jesus would do it because the mind of Christ has been formed in us. It becomes our second nature... automatic even.

This week I was walking around the church parking lot and I could smell the lilacs beginning to bloom. Has anyone else smelled them this year? There is an especially beautiful lilac bush by the sidewalk that leads down to the labyrinth, and it's just covered in flowers. So, I stopped there, and took in a deep breath of the beauty of the flower. You know the aroma, right?

It has a very particular sweet smell.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul says we are to be the **"aroma of Christ."** That sweet aroma of life and beauty. But so often in our history the church has stunk.

Spiritual formation is about becoming people who smell like Jesus. We just give off this aroma whether we're trying or not. It comes out of our pores. It's a visceral thing at the core of who we are.

It's not about one particular behavior, or one set of theology, or even the disciplines and spiritual practices we adapt.

All those have their place... They are tools in the tool belt, but they are not the point. The point is about the kind of people we're becoming... A people who smell a whole lot like Jesus.

"Let this same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus," Paul writes.

Now, maybe the simplicity of this does seem a bit obvious. But we also have to know what Christ we're talking about. And that's what we'll be talking about the next several weeks.

There are a lot of ideas out there about this Jesus we're following. In fact, you can find a different Jesus being sold for just about every economic agenda and political campaign in our time. We're really good at re-making Jesus into our own image.

We're going to spend the next three weeks unpacking what a Christ-consciousness, or "the mind of Christ" looks like.

But for today I want to invite you to hear this, and hear it deeply. My deep desire for us as a church is that at our core, we will be a community of people who are partnering together to become more like Christ.

It's really that simple.

As a church we are not here to meet every need you have,
nor could we if we tried.

We can't tackle every issue in our world [that is important to you],
nor could we if we tried.

We are not here to provide you with an emotional experience every week,
or answer every theological question you have.
nor could we if we tried.

Sure, we do bits of all those things but the *aim* of our life together is to become the aroma of Christ...

The aroma of Christ as a living sacrifice up to God,
the aroma of Christ to one another here in community,
and the aroma of Christ to the world.

If that's what you desire to become, if it's what you desire for your own life,
for your family's life,
for those you love,
then you're in the right place. We're in it with you.

Let's Pray:

O God,

Help us to become this sweet aroma.

May those who gather here among us...know your goodness.

And when we leave from this place each week, make us carriers of your fragrant beauty and life
into every place we go.

We confess even now, that this often isn't the case.

We've been less than loving with our family, even this week.

We've been more consumed with our own to-do lists than consumed with your life.

We so often feel stuck, operating out of the same old mind and patterns.

And so we're here, asking even now...

For your grace,

for your love,

for your spirit to come and make us whole.

Come and free us from the patterns that get us stuck.

Come and form us into your hands and feet in the world

Through Christ we pray,

Amen.