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 First Sun of Lent

Love Can Change Your Mind
Philippians 2:1-11

*If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, ² make my **joy complete**: be of the **same mind**, having the **same love**, being in full accord and of **one mind**. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in **humility regard** others as better than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the **interests of others**. ⁵ Let the **same mind** be in you that was^[a] in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, ⁷ but **emptied himself**, taking the form of a **slave**, being born in **human** likeness. And being found in human form, ⁸ he **humbled himself** and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Let the **same mind** be in you that was in Christ Jesus....
 Jesus—who **emptied** himself as a servant, even though he was God!
 Jesus—who completely **humbled** himself, putting the whole world first!

Is it even possible for us to have that **mind of Christ**?
 What would that even look like?

Wouldn't that mean we have to ***change our minds?***
 Because we naturally ***think of ourselves first*** --
 It can seem impossible to have the mind of Christ.
 But Jesus is the one who said, ***With God, all things are possible.***

So can we have ***the mind*** of Christ?

Yes we can.

But first we need to understand Paul's word for "***mind***" here in Greek—
 It's far more than just head knowledge,
 it means '***mind-set***', '***attitude***', or '***way of life***'.

Now, I don't know about you,
 but my way of life doesn't always conform to that of Jesus Christ.
 Our mindset often runs counter to his mindset.

To follow Christ requires a ***transformation*** of our minds, right?
 I mean, we don't naturally live as humble servants, do we?

Paul speaks about transformation in **Romans 12:2** when he says:
*Do not be conformed to this world,^[4] but be **transformed by the renewing of your minds**, so that you may discern what is the will of God....*

See, the ***world*** teaches a certain mind-set.

Let's call it '***me-first***'.

But Jesus calls us to have an '***others-first***' mindset,
 so that we can truly follow Him.

But that means something in us will have to ***change***.

So, ask yourself right now--what does it take to ***change YOUR mind?***

Does it work for someone to scare or coerce you?

Or debate you? Or educate you?

What's the ***BEST way*** for someone to change ***your mind?***

Have you ever known a ***quintessential bachelor?***

A man who is master of his domain,

doing his own thing, in his own time, in his own way, day after day?

One day I heard a group of friends talking about such a man.

I was visiting a church, and listening to a woman talk about

Her beloved **Pastor John**—the ultimate bachelor,
 He was a good preacher, but a little lacking in the compassion
 department....more about numbers, less about people, very rigid in his
 schedule, very set in his ways, always the same routine until....
 all of the sudden they noticed that he is out visiting people, he's smiling... he's
 suddenly a chatty Cathy at church potlucks.

What changed I asked?

Her name is Jane.

They are getting married next month! He's a new man!

Have you ever seen that happen?

I sure have.

Someone completely changed when they fall ***in LOVE?***

LOVE can change your mind.

Or how about an 80-year old woman from the Deep South,
 raised in segregation, and stuck in that mindset,
 until she joined a Bible study and found herself sitting across the table
 from an African American woman her age.

And through that study, she befriended that woman,
 and even spoke later at her funeral,

And how ***LOVE had changed her mind.***

Has **LOVE** ever changed ***your*** mind?

Rarely are our minds changed by coercion, or fear.

Occasionally, people change our minds with information, or education.

But Love is different.

Love can ***transform*** hearts and minds.

LOVE can change ***everything.***

So, if we ***want the mind of Christ—we need to be looking for love.***

Because that's what's at the heart of Philippians 2, isn't it?

Paul is telling us that Jesus' humbly emptying himself, becoming human,
 becoming a servant, going all the way to the cross ...

All of it is the ultimate example of ***self-giving LOVE.***

Jesus wasn't in this life for himself, he had nothing to call his own,
All he had was **LOVE**,
so that is what we see in his ***life, death, and resurrection***.

Jesus' love is evident in everything he did as a leader, as a Lord and Savior.
In our Wednesday Bible study we were talking about ***character traits of great leaders***, and multiple people said that the best are ***servant-leaders***.
Leaders who are willing to do what their own employees do,
Much like the show—*Undercover Boss*.
Ever seen that show?
Bosses going undercover in their own companies, to do what the ordinary employee does, and to see what's really happening in their company.
And often they would find an employee going above and beyond,
as a servant.

We talked about how great leaders actually ***care*** about those they lead,
They aren't in it for themselves.
They want to empower others.
Ever known a leader like that?

Wasn't *Jesus the ultimate example of that?*
Leading his disciples like a humble servant, washing their feet,
Feeding them, caring for them,
And empowering them to serve others and carry on his mission.
And what was the ***foundation of all that?***
LOVE.

The Love of Christ compelled his followers to give up their lives in service.
The love of Christ is what changed their minds.
Because ***love CAN change your mind***.

HOW does love change our minds today?
For most of us it starts with a ***stop***—
we have to stop what we're currently doing, and turn around.
(*which is what the word "**repent**" means in the Bible—
to turn around and go in a new direction*).
It's like when the GPS app on your phone says,
Recalculating. It means you have to turn around.

So if we allow it, Jesus offers us the opportunity to go in a *new direction*.
Or in the words of Paul, *we can adopt a new mind-set*.

The mind of Christ.

We can let go of the 'me-first', and adopt the '*others-first*' mind of Christ.

This is a foundational part of our *Lenten journey*,
It's where we get the *ashes* of Ash Wednesday,
They symbolize *confession*, and *admitting* who we are before God,
And how we *want to be like Christ*.

HOW does love change our minds today?

It happens when we ask ourselves:

What would Jesus do in this situation? In this relationship?

Today we heard the story of the *Good Samaritan*.

So, **where are we** in that story? Honestly?

Are we the Priest or Levite—with good intentions,
but scared to stop and help someone in need?

Would we stop for a stranger? Do we?

And **where is Jesus** in this story? He is the Good Samaritan, right?

How can we see that love of the Samaritan,

And allow it to change our minds,
and put us on the path to serving others?

How does love change our minds TODAY?

It happens when we realize that the Bible is not a self-help book,
or a self-improvement manual.

And we are not called to just 'do better'.

or earn salvation through good works.

The Gospels are not about earning, or working, or living your best life now.

The Word of God, the Gospel of Jesus Christ—is all about **LOVE**.

Being **transformed—by LOVE**.

The kind of love that can change minds.

Our calling is to love the way Jesus loves us.

Jesus IS Love in the flesh.

Our **living God IS Love**.

The kind of love that is self-less, self-sacrificing, and putting others first.
The kind of love that died on the cross for us!

That's the kind of love that can change your mind, right?

So, HOW does love change our minds, today?

It happens when realize how much God loves us.

And how WE are often the person in the ditch on the side of the road.

And Jesus ***stops and helps us, all out of love.***

Think about a person who loves you dearly—

Now multiple that by a trillion,

and that's just a fraction of how much ***God loves you.***

We say it, we sing it, we believe it in theory.

But friends, God's love for us is almost beyond comprehension.

And it is God's love for us—

That we experience through people around us,

that flows from our hearts to other people.

It is God's love—that ***gives us a new mind—the mind of Christ.***

Because love can change our mind.

Today we come to the Lord's Table for ***communion,***

Which is a physical example of ***Christ's love for us.***

He gave his own body and blood ---as a gift, a sacrifice, an offering—

Of LOVE.

Talk about changing hearts and minds!

Some of the most ***powerful moments in worship***

are the words of communion, and eating and drinking the bread and cup,

and for me, seeing the congregation partake of this holy meal.

I firmly believe that Love CAN change our minds.

I believe that the ***most powerful force***

for acceptance and understanding is love.

When someone loves us, life is different, isn't it?

And when we love someone,

transformation can happen, right?

I've seen that kind of transformation, have you?

Martin Luther King, Jr. preached often about love being the most powerful force in the world. In his sermons on loving enemies, he famously said what is now inscribed on his national monument in Washington, D.C.:
Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that.
Hate cannot drive out hate, only LOVE can do that."

He was right, the thing that ***changes hearts and minds*** more than any arguments or information, fear or coercion, is simply **LOVE**.

The easiest way to ***accept*** someone you consider an enemy, Or different, or simply 'other',
Is when that person is someone you love.

I truly came to accept people of different backgrounds and beliefs, when the person who was different was someone I love. I truly came to understand and accept people of a different orientation, When those people, were people I love.
Love CAN change your mind.

Will we allow our minds to be changed?

On this ***First Sunday of Lent***,
let us leave here, thinking about how love can change our minds.
 We have 40 days before Easter,
 To prepare our hearts for the cross and the resurrection.
 So this week—let's ***examine*** our hearts and lives,
 Let's ask whether we have our priorities straight,
 whether our relationship with God is right,
 where we are on our spiritual journey.

Lent is our ***time to seek the mind of Christ***.
 A mind that we can only understand and emulate,
 When we know how much ***we are loved*** by Jesus Christ.
 The mind we can embrace,
 when we are willing ***give up*** ourselves,

and our 'me-first' mindset, in order to love.

For some people Lent means *sacrifice*—
giving something up, which is very important and powerful.
For some it means *taking up* something new,
like a Lenten Bible study on Wednesday nights.

But most of all
Lent is about being of one mind—
The mind of *Christ*.
The mind of *LOVE*.

As we go forth into this holy Lenten season,
may we *allow LOVE to change our minds*.
And for this love, all God's people say together, Amen.