

“Of One Mind”
Philippians 2:1-11
Sermon series: Who Do You Say That I Am?
Today’s answer: Jesus, our Lord

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A number of years ago, I read an article about two sisters, Krista and Tatiana.¹

Krista and Tatiana are twins.

And the reason the article was written was that these sisters possess a quality, a characteristic that is very UNIQUE.

These two sisters share the same mind.
Not in a figurative sense.
In a physical sense.

They are conjoined twins.
Their skulls are fused together.

They’ve grown up together, with their family in Canada, and today there are almost teenagers.

Now...while each girl has a brain inside her skull, their “brain images reveal what looks like an attenuated line stretching between the two organs.”

What does this mean?
It means they can say different things, talk to different people.

But then there’s this.
Back when they were little girls, Krista reached for a cup of juice.

“ ‘I am drinking really, really, really fast,’ she announced and started to power-slurp her juice...Tatiana was...sitting beside her but not looking at her [sister], and suddenly [Tatiana’s] eyes went wide.

¹ “Could Conjoined Twins Share a Mind?”, by Susan Dominus, *The New York Times*, May 25, 2011.

“Whoa!” she said, putting her hand on her stomach.
 Now remember...the juice went into Krista’s stomach.
 But Tatiana felt it like it was in her stomach!

In other words, they “share the senses of touch and taste and even control one another’s limbs.”²

So they share the same mind, right?
 Not exactly.

One day Krista was eating ketchup, she liked ketchup.
 Tatiana was not eating ketchup.
 Tatiana does not like ketchup.
 How did her mom learn that Tatiana does not like ketchup?

Because as Krista was eating her ketchup, Tatiana was trying to scrape the ketchup off of her own tongue, when there was absolutely no ketchup on Tatiana’s tongue...³

Can you imagine this?
 I cannot imagine this.
 Two sisters...the same mind—and not the same mind.

I share it with you because of our text.
 Our text this morning begins with the following invitation from the Apostle Paul:

“...be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.”

What does that mean?
 What’s Paul talking about, when he says to the church, “be...of one mind?”

After all, one of the wonderful characteristics of OUR church is the diversity of minds that exist in these pews.

² For more information about the Hogan twins, see https://www.cbc.ca/cbcdocspov/m_features/the-hogan-twins-share-a-brain-and-see-out-of-each-others-eyes.

³ “Could Conjoined Twins Share a Mind?”, by Susan Dominus, *The New York Times*, May 25, 2011.

When Paul says, “be of one mind,” does he mean that because I am disappointed that the Yankees lost their playoff series, everyone else here should be disappointed that the Yankees lost their playoff series?

No...he does not mean that.

Does Paul mean that everyone at Westminster should vote the same?
Dress the same? Give the same amount to our church?

No...he does not mean that either.

I think, I think what Paul means is not that we all ought to do the same or even think the same about everything—but that we all belong to the same Lord.

Paul is getting at is BELONGING.

The knowledge and confidence
that because we all confess Jesus as our Lord,
we belong to Jesus and we belong to one another.

It is, of course, our stewardship campaign theme this fall: belong.
But before we talk stewardship, let's just talk belonging for a moment.

Do you know how powerful it is to feel like you belong?
Like you belong where you are?
Or belong to something greater than yourself?

A group of five of us from our church just returned from our mission trip to Cuba this past week. Terrific experience, we met many wonderful people—fellow Presbyterians, practicing their Christian faith in Presbyterian churches in a communist country.

One of my most memorable experiences from the trip was being in a church where the language was not my own, and I'm about to preach to a congregation full of people whose life experiences are so much different than my own life experiences....

But even with those differences,
 their Sunday morning liturgy was basically like our liturgy,
 and there was a communion table up front, in the center,
 just like we have a communion table in the center.

And when the prelude for the service was “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee,”
 I was almost brought to tears.

Why was I fighting back tears?

Because even with all the differences—
 different language, different economy, different culture—
 there was something that held us together,
 qualities that Presbyterian churches in Cuba and the U.S.
 hold in common.

Qualities that transcend history and geography
 and language and culture.

It was, if I can use Paul’s language,
 like their church and our church
 were of ONE MIND.

Confessing and following the SAME Lord.

And at that moment, I felt like I was right where I belonged...

Do you know that feeling?
 That feeling of belonging?

It’s a POWERFUL feeling.
 And...a necessary feeling.

In his book *Tribe: On Homecoming and Belonging*, Sebastian Junger writes that “in 2015, the George Washington Law Review surveyed more than 6,000 lawyers and found that conventional success in the legal profession—such as high billable hours or making partner at a law firm—had zero correlation with levels of happiness and well-being reported by the lawyers themselves.

Junger goes on to note:

“The findings are in keeping with something called self-determination theory, which holds that human beings need three basic things in order to be content: they need to feel competent at what they do;
they need to feel authentic in their lives;
and they need to feel connected to others.”⁴

In other words, they need to feel like they belong.

This is what it means to call Jesus our Lord.
We belong to one another—even though there are real differences in this room.

And I’m not just talking Carolina and Clemson.

There are differences here about what the future of our country ought to be.
There are differences here about what the future of our church ought to be.

There are even small differences about what worship ought to be like at Westminster. Or what mission ought to look like at Westminster.

And that’s ok.

Because I believe God comes to us not simply when we all believe exactly the same thing about everything. I believe God comes to us in church through difference.

For example...

The Rev. Matt Fitzgerald is a UCC pastor, now in Chicago, who once served a church in Massachusetts.

He tells of the time, when he was in Massachusetts, that a Hollywood location scout showed up at his church’s door and offered the church \$10,000 to shut down their sanctuary for three days. This Hollywood company wanted to use the sanctuary to film a scene from an upcoming Adam Sandler movie.

⁴ Sebastian Junger, *Tribe: On Homecoming and Belonging*, New York: Hachette Book Group, 2016.

His congregation was embarking on a \$100,000 renovation of their Sunday school rooms, and the money could certainly help.

“I am not the kind of Christian who would boycott a movie,” writes Fitzgerald.

“But the church I serve is not mine, and I found myself wanting to protect its true owner...I remembered what a pain it is to rent the church out for *anything*...[so] I ...said no to the location scout. It felt good.

“And then Hollywood called back and offered us \$60,000.”

What to do?

What would you do?

If we received a \$60,000 offer to film a movie in this sanctuary, what should the Session say??

Fitzgerald convened the board of his church to bring other people in on the decision.

“I stayed on the sidelines,” he writes, “frustrated at my own irresolution and slightly embarrassed that my scruples seemed to have a \$50,000 price tag.”

A straw poll was taken on the board.

18 in favor. 5 were opposed.

“We spent nearly two hours discussing how difficult it is to find funds in a down economy...what a powerful impact this unexpected windfall might have on the children of our church...how beautiful our Sunday school might look.

We talked and talked...

Then all of a sudden one of our longtime deacons said, “Look—it seems as if saying yes to this offer is going to hurt some members of the congregation. Not most people. Obviously not the majority. But some people. So I guess the question isn’t about a movie. It’s about us.

Is \$60,000 worth hurting some of our members?”

Five minutes later the board unanimously voted no.⁵

“Let each of you look not to your own interests,” writes Paul, “but to the interests of others.”

That’s what this BELONGING business means, when it comes to church.

In our passage from Acts today, Luke describes what life was like in the early church.

“...the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul...

“There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.”

In other words, ONE MIND.

By sharing their belongings, they belonged to one another.

Now don’t worry.

I’m not suggesting that each of you sell your house and make the proceeds your pledge for our stewardship campaign. That is not my clumsy segue into talking stewardship this morning.

I am suggesting that belonging to this faith community has something to do with what we give to it, what we share with it, what energy and ideas we offer, AND what pledge we make in the coming year.

What does belonging to Westminster mean to you?

What does sharing a common commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord mean to you?

⁵ Matt Fitzgerald, “Take the money and run?”, *The Christian Century*, October 24, 2011.

Fred Buechner once imagined God saying to each of us:

“Here is your life. You might never have been, but you are because the party wouldn’t have been complete without you...

Don’t be afraid. I am with you.
 Nothing can ever separate us.
 It’s for you I created the universe. I love you.”⁶

I think Buechner was talking about BELONGING.
 Belonging to one another, and belonging to God.

I’ve mentioned before the Presbyterian pastor Michael Lindvall. Years ago, Michael Lindvall wrote a series of FICTIONAL stories about a small, Presbyterian church, with a pastor serving that church who was fresh out of seminary.

One of the stories is about a couple of baptisms that occurred in the life of this imaginary congregation.

The Sunday before Thanksgiving, an elder in the church, a silver haired pillar of the congregation named Angus MacDowell, approached their new pastor.

Angus was hoping that his NEW BABY grandchild, Angus Larry, could be baptized the following Sunday because it would be Thanksgiving weekend and Angus Larry’s folks would be visiting from the West Coast with their boy.

What about their home church?

Angus replied there was no home church.

His son and his wife just hadn’t found the right fit out on the West Coast.

Being a fresh-out-of-seminary Presbyterian, this pastor explained that he really ought not to do this because the couple really ought to find a church home

⁶ Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker’s ABC*, New York: HarperCollins, 1993.

THERE, and have the baptism in their church home THERE, a place where the parents' promises to raise their child in the faith would actually MEAN they had a church in which they could raise their child in the Christian faith.

So Angus said thank-you, and he left—

And before the pastor knew what had happened, he received a phone call inviting him to come to a special called Session meeting the next evening, where the Session approved the baptism of Angus Larry, by a 9-0 vote—and scheduled it for Thanksgiving weekend.

Now this church had a home-spun tradition of its own during baptism. The minister was supposed to ask ALL the family members present for the occasion the question:

“Who stands with this child?”

And every family member—

grandparents, aunts, cousins—EVERYONE there—
would get up and stand to show support for the parents.

So they did that at Angus Larry's baptism, and all sorts of family were there, and they stood up at the question, and Angus—the elder—stood there just as proud as could be.

After the service, the minister was the only one left and as he was shutting off the lights to the sanctuary, he noticed that one person he did NOT know had stuck around.

She was the mother of a teenager who had grown up in the church. Her daughter was now 18-years-old, and she had just had a baby boy named Jimmy. They both wanted Jimmy baptized, but this teenage mother was afraid to ask the pastor because the father of the boy was nowhere to be found.

Well—the pastor thought to himself, if we're gonna baptize Angus Larry, who lives three thousand miles away, we're certainly going to baptize little Jimmy, who lives right here.

So the baptism was scheduled for the last Sunday of Advent.

Now picture the scene:

Small town, just before Christmas, the church was full.
And it came time for the baptism.

Jimmy's mother was standing at the front of the sanctuary, holding her son,
all by herself.

The time came for the question: "Who stands with this child?"

Well, the child's grandmother, sitting in the front pew, stood up....and of
course, *THAT WAS IT.*

There was no other family.

For the first time,
that long-standing tradition in the church felt AWKWARD.

The loneliness of that family was there for everyone to see.

But then, there was a rustling in the pews,
and stubborn old Angus MacDowell stood up.

And his wife stood up beside him.

And then a couple of elders stood up.
And then the sixth-grade Sunday school teacher.

And another couple, and another person...until the whole church was
standing up in support of this mother and her new baby.

The pastor lost his train of thought.
But no words were necessary.⁷

⁷ Michael Lindvall, *Good News from North Haven*, New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002.

Because that congregation had just said to Jimmy's mother:

We are of ONE MIND.
You BELONG to us...

Now I know...that's a fictional story.
Another person made it up, it's not true.
Or is it true?

Let me tell you a true story.

You belong here.
And you belong here.
And you belong here.

We belong to one another.
And most importantly, we belong to our Lord, Jesus Christ.

I hope you will spend the next few weeks considering what that means to you.

Commitment Sunday is November 10th, still three weeks away.

Consider what belonging to this church means to you.
Consider what you can share.
Consider what you can pledge.

And as you do, remember this:

The party that our Lord, Jesus Christ, is throwing...well—
it would never,
ever have been complete
without you.

Amen.