*The LCA provides this sermon edited for lay-reading, with thanks to the original author.*

Sermon for Year A Proper 21

# The Text: Philippians 2:5

One of Gertie’s friends dropped by with a note saying it was from her sister. With some concern she quickly opened the note. It read:

*Dear Gertie,
I think I’m losing my mind. The other day, I was standing at the bottom of the stairs at the front of my house. I wasn’t sure whether I had come down the stairs or was about to go up into the house. Then, I was standing in front of the fridge. I wasn’t sure whether I was getting something out of it or putting something back. It really got bad when I found myself standing in front of the shower wondering whether I was going to get into the shower or if I had just finished it.
Well, anyway, I’m at the railway station and I’m not sure if I’m getting on the train after visiting you or getting off to come and make a visit. Can you come to the station and help me out?
Signed,
Your sister who’s losing her mind.*

I think all of us have those moments when we stop in the middle of doing something and wonder, “What is it that I was about to do?” “What have I come here to do?”

Sometimes this happens because we’ve been distracted. Sometimes it’s because we’re not thinking what we’re doing. Sometimes we are having brain overload—there are too many things to remember. Sometimes it’s emotional stress that causes memory loss. Whatever it is this loss of memory can be very frustrating.

The title of this sermon is: “Losing your mind.” Now, some people think that you have lost your mind by virtue of the fact that you are a Christian. People can’t believe that you actually enjoy going to church. People can’t believe that you give money to the church and volunteer your time to do things at the church. People can’t believe that in this day and age you accept the teachings of the church. Quite frankly, they think you’ve lost your mind, and maybe you have.

To “lose your mind” is really a very good biblical concept. To be the kind of Christian that God wants you to be, it is necessary to lose your mind. Paul issued the command to the Philippians that they were to take on the mind of Christ. It is impossible for us to have the mind of Christ while having minds that are filled with other things.

You see, the mind is a very powerful part of who we are. It is the mind that determines what kind of people we are. It shapes our motives and choices - why we say and do the things that we do. If you take on an attitude of negativity, hostility, solitude, being difficult to get along with, it follows that without a doubt these things will impact on everything in your everyday life and relationships.

Parents and schools go to great lengths to ensure that children develop good attitudes towards themselves and positive outlooks to how they relate to others to ensure that their minds are moulded by compassion, service, hope, courage, love, forgiveness, tolerance, acceptance, justice and so on. Even then the positive minds that are created in childhood can sometimes be changed into something else through life’s negative experiences.

A young man went to the Vietnam War, friendly, helpful, happy, enjoying the company of friends and involved in the youth program at church. When he came home, he was a different person. His mind had changed and now he was angry, negative, he easily became violent, spoke harshly, and despised anyone in any position of authority. You might say he had ‘lost his mind’ – the mind that he was born with and that his parent’s nurtured and encouraged was lost in the horrors of war.

The mind is a very important and a very powerful part of us and Paul tells us in a manner of speaking to “lose our mind”. He is saying to lose our old sinful mind and attitudes and to take on the mind of Christ.

God created us with bodies, minds and souls. Sin corrupts every part of us. When Jesus died on the cross, he redeemed our bodies, souls and minds—all of us. Paul says in Romans that living with Christ includes the renewal of our minds by the Holy Spirit—that means he gets our minds thinking on the right track, in the right direction—so that our attitudes and actions are good too (Romans 12:2).

This is what Paul is saying to the Philippians. In the beginning of the chapter he talks about the qualities of strength, love, compassion and kindness that they share because of their union with Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Paul urges them to use these qualities saying, *“Don't do anything from selfish ambition or from a cheap desire to boast, but be humble toward one another, always considering others better than yourselves.* *And look out for one another's interests, not just for your own” (Phil 2:4,5).*

In fact, he goes further. He says that he wants them to have somebody else’s mind, the mind of Christ: *“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus”*. Then he goes on to talk about how Jesus took on the attitude of a servant, how he looked for ways to help others, how he loved others, humbled himself, was obedient … all the way to the cross.

*“Let this same mind be in you.”* Is that really possible? Is it really possible to be able to think like Jesus and then to act with the mind of Christ; to have his humility, his love, his compassion, his obedience, his attitude of service, his dedication?

People who met Jesus could certainly relate to what Paul is talking about here. Take Zaccheus as an example. A mean-spirited cheat, a greedy, selfish, little man, that is, until he met Jesus. And what a change came over his attitudes! He took on the mind of Jesus and became compassionate, kind, generous, caring and understanding.

The apostle Paul knew from personal experience how God works in us to change and renew our minds in just the same way that we experience in other areas of our life. He was riding along the road to Damascus – his mind was filled with anger, hatred, violence and self-righteousness as he plotted his next attack on the followers of Jesus Christ. He even thought his mind was full of God-pleasing thoughts as he carried out his attacks on Christians but he was far from the mind and attitude of God.

On the road he met Jesus and then over the next few days the Holy Spirit worked in him a complete change of his mind. In fact, he went to the synagogue and started preaching that Jesus was the Son of God and he did it so powerfully and convincingly that people couldn’t believe that such a change of mind was possible. Paul no longer hated Jesus; instead he demonstrated his love for him. So when Paul said to the Philippians, *“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus”,* he knew exactly what he was talking about and he knew that wasn’t just pie in the sky stuff; it really was possible for a person’s mind to be changed by the renewing that comes from knowing Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit.

We know how easily children adopt the mind and attitudes of their friends. It might be something they say or an attitude that is different—either good or bad—that makes you stop and think, “Where did that come from?” And you realise that another person has had an influence over the mind of your child which you are either happy about or you need to correct. That change of mind and attitude and behaviour comes from the child spending time with, seeing, hearing and picking up on new ways at expressing themselves or looking at things or their own problems. And the more time that young person spends with friends, the more his or her thinking will become like their friends’ thinking.

This provides us with a clue as to how our mind can be the same as that of Jesus Christ. Live with Christ and you will grow to be like him. The Holy Spirit influences us, changing our thinking, renewing our minds with the mind of Christ, transforming our attitudes, changing us to people who are humble toward one another, always considering others better than ourselves and looking out for the interests of others, not just for our own (Phil 2:4).

This is a lifelong process. It’s not something that normally happens just once at a conversion experience with bright lights and voices from the heavens. It’s something that happens every day. It’s an ongoing process because we find it so easy to adopt the mind of the world and Satan. We need to be renewed through the blood of Jesus. Every day the Holy Spirit calls us to turn away from the mind-set of sin and Satan and calls us back to what God has redeemed us to be: people who have the same mind, attitudes and outlook that Jesus Christ has.

We grow into the mind of Christ through reading Christ’s Word in the Bible; through coming together with our fellow believers in worship where Jesus himself comes to us not only in his word, but in his own body and blood in Holy Communion; through prayer. Through that speaking and listening, Jesus is creating and implanting his way of thinking, his way of living, in us.

Or to put it another way, we lose our mind—our selfish and worldly attitudes—and put on the same mind that Jesus had—the attitudes promoted by the Holy Spirit: love, forgiveness, peace, patience, generosity, gentleness, self-control and humility.

The greatest question facing us is this: Whose values do we live by? Whose mind do we have? What attitudes have we taken up? Christ’s or somebody else’s? Is it Christ who forms his mind, his servant love and humility and gentleness in us, or is it something else that influences our thinking and our way of life?

We are called into a deeper and closer relationship with our Saviour. He seeks to change our minds, to change our thinking, and to make us more loving, more caring, more forgiving and more willing to lose our minds, be like Christ, and make a difference in the lives of others. Amen.