

Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
April 30 & May 1, 2011
Lee Hanssen
Encouragement in Christ
Philippians 2:1-4

My name is Lee Hanssen and I'm full-time on the staff here with CPC as the Associate Director of Commitment Class. Many months ago I walked through these doors a stranger but now at the end of the year, that came very fast, I sit and look out on the congregation and see all sorts of faces of people I know. I look at my students here, whom I got to walk with through this year, and I know their lives. I know their stories. It happened so fast. These moments, whether you are a parent, a grandparent, or a staff member at the church who saw them baptized when they were this big, it came so quickly. Wednesday night after I dismissed them to their small group, Rich Phenow and I sat there and we both teared up. I don't think I was ready for the end to come so fast but it sure has been a great year.

I grew up in Edina but I did not go to school here. I went to a little school called Benilde-St. Margaret's—no need for hissing! When I was 16 years old, all I wanted was a red Audi A4. Pretty reasonable, I thought. *If only* I had this car, *then* my life would be so much better. Think of all that extra horsepower I would have to nicely merge onto the freeway, that nice comfortable ride as I drove over those potholes on Hennepin and Lyndale that eat your car up. I wouldn't even feel them, you know the ones. I was convinced that if I had this car that my life would be so much better.

Now something you need to know about me that the staff here has come to know quite well, is that I don't always prepare for things the best. I'm a last-minute type of guy. Yesterday I was supposed to be here at 3:30 and I was in my bed until one o'clock writing this sermon. Friday night I went out and celebrated with good friends of mine, Mandy and her husband. I turned 23 on Friday. We went out to this place in St. Louis Park, maybe some of you have been there, called Cooper. We were having a good time, having some appetizers, and I went to use the restroom. Girls, this is a little education for you. In front of men's restroom urinals, there are always advertisements. Traditionally they are set around things like golf. Alcohol is also a big one. Another subject is automobiles. So I am using the restroom, and this sign is in front of my face (*slide shown*). I just thought how perfect. If I hadn't been sure that this is what God would have me share today, that would have been when I knew. But it got really weird when I pulled out my camera in the restroom with all these other people in there and started taking the picture. I'm like, "Oh, no, don't worry about it. I'm giving a sermon this weekend. It's just going to be a slide. It's not a big deal."

Whether you are aware of it or not, we live in a world full of these *if* and these *then* scenarios. We spend countless hours running through our heads, "*If only*, fill in the blank, *then* my life would be so much different." Maybe it is not an Audi A4 for you but tell me if any of these sound familiar. "*If* I just had a little bit bigger house, *then* my problems would be solved." Or "*If* I just had a little bit more money, a little bit bigger 401(k), I'd be so much more at peace". "*If* I just had

a different job or better clothes....” How many of you resonate with this one? “*If I just had an iPhone or an iPad, then I could certainly be a bigger part of solving the world’s crises.*” Or maybe a little bit more personal for some of you, “*If my wife or my husband would just.... and you can fill in that blank, then our marriage would be so much better.*” “*If he didn’t or if she didn’t say that, then....*” Or “*If my mom and my dad just weren’t so strict, if they just understood, then my life would be so much happier.*” “*If this boy or this girl would like me,*” or “*If I could just get into this group of friends, then my life would be so much better.*”

If we stop and think about these statements, do we really think that a house or more money in our bank account or certain friend is really going to give us what our souls are craving? And, furthermore, I wonder how different my life would be, I wonder how different this church would be, your marriages, your relationships with your folks would be, if we just shifted our focus a little bit and came to understand that what our hearts and our souls are really longing for is to know Jesus more and to know Jesus in a different way. I wonder what our lives would look like if our hearts sounded maybe a little bit more like this—“*If I just understood grace a little bit better, then....*” or “*If I just had passion for unity in the church like Paul did, then....*” or “*If we just had the zeal to know Jesus like Peter did, then maybe our lives would look a little bit different.*”

We are in a series speaking about of the Book of Philippians, which is a letter that Paul wrote to a group of people, a mixed group of people just like us, young and old, wealthy, not so wealthy. This group, this hodge-podge of people, had all sorts of questions running through their heads about how their lives might be so much different. We pick up the text in Philippians 2:1. I chose to speak out of The Message because I think that whoever wrote The Message did a fantastic job of summarizing what Paul was trying to get across. Listen to some of the questions Paul is asking.

¹⁻⁴If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care—then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.

One of the things that I think is so creative and so insightful that Paul does so subtly in this passage is that he has framed a set of invitations and questions that is encouraging this body of believers, this group of people, to take a long hard look at their lives and invite them to a better life—one like Christ’s. We live in a world that is very focused on external things and when I say external things, I mean behaviors, the way people look, saying the right things or not saying other things, but I see in this passage a very internal motivation from Paul. Paul doesn’t seem to be concerned with all those things that I think the world and sometimes even the church wants us to be concerned with. Paul is concerned with other things. This list of questions that Paul asks are things that only Jesus can do inside of your life once you know Him.

A couple weeks ago I was teaching a Bible study to our senior class here and I was studying the concept of sinlessness because it was tripping me up. In the Bible I hear about sinning no more and being a good person and I know I love Jesus but I know I make a lot of mistakes and so I wanted to understand this concept more. I came across this quote, “Righteous conduct is not a condition to knowing Christ but a consequence of it.” This is a very internal statement. What the author of this quote is saying is that we don’t have to have it all figured out. Being perfect and having it all together don’t come on the front side of knowing Christ. That comes *because* we

know Him. When you experience the Gospel and you experience the person of Jesus, everything changes in your life. That is how we become the type of person that we all hope to be. I really and truly believe if we focus on the externals, we are interested in managing our behavior but, hear me very clearly, Jesus has no interest in managing our behaviors. He wants to change our lives.

This brings us back to the passage where Paul talks about the participation of the Spirit and agreeing with each other. He says, *if* we let God change our hearts, we will experience His love and have changed lives, internal things that only God can do, *then* it will produce in this body of believers genuine unity. That is how we can count others as more significant than we count ourselves because, church, I really believe **we can't really expect the church, this place, this group, this body of people, to be something that we aren't willing to become ourselves.** And we can only get there by knowing the person of Christ and understanding the Gospel in a way that we may not today.

When I read this passage, I really believe that Paul was looking for the right results and, to get them, Paul was asking the right kinds of questions. He wasn't focused on external things and stuff. He was focused on a group of people, a body of believers just like you and me, who wanted to figure out how to follow this Rabbi, by inviting them to take a long, hard look at their lives and their hearts and their road to Jesus in order that they might become nothing short of the men and women that God was calling them to be. Because they were becoming the men and women God was calling them to be, this church, this body of believers, would become nothing less than what God had intended *it* to be.

After reading this over and over, it seemed so obvious. Hindsight is always 20/20, isn't it? I truly believe that how we end up and where we end up is often because we are so focused on the wrong things. It is so easy to ask ourselves the wrong questions so I wonder what are the wrong *if-and-then* scenarios? What are those scenes that you keep running through your head that you might be asking yourself? Are we concerned with the cares of this world or do we hunger and thirst to know Jesus better? Do we just want life to be easier, or are we longing to do whatever it takes to know holiness? Do we consider others more significant than ourselves or are we constantly worried about getting to the front?

Congregation, as we gather to celebrate and as we gather to welcome in a whole new generation of the church, our future leaders, may we be encouraging. May we model and may we be the types of people who are asking the right questions. Commitment Class of 2011, may you be a generation that is so tuned in to Jesus that at a very young age, you begin asking yourselves the right questions that will in turn lead us, lead this body, to be the body that God is intending us to be. Pray with me.

Jesus, I believe it is our desire that we would become the place that You desire, nothing more, nothing less. I believe that these students can take us there. I believe You are changing their lives but I believe that You want so much more. Come around us as a body. Come around them as a class. Protect them, guide them, and bless them. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.