

Jeremiah 29:11 (NRSV)

¹¹ For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.

Philippians 2:1-13 (NRSV, adapted)

² If then there is any encouragement from being united with Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and tenderness, 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 only to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵ Let the same attitude be in you that was 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 servant,
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 bow,
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 Creator.

¹² Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for God's good pleasure.



Knowing Jesus Christ

I had just turned 22 years of age when I became a pastor of two churches on the eastern border of Broome County, NY. I was young and inexperienced at life, but God somehow thought I could bring blessing to the Jesus followers of these rural communities. True to the stories you hear from other pastors, yes, I had my first funeral after only

serving for nine days. But, it was not until I had shared almost five months there, that I walked with a family through the “valley of the shadow of death.” Catherine “Jo” Decker, the matriarch of the largest family in the region, was actively dying. I had the privilege of visiting with the family several times, and had begun to feel quite close to them. All nine of Jo’s children, and most of their offspring, were still members of the church I served. It was Thanksgiving week, and Jo was determined to hang on long enough to bid farewell to her youngest son, who was returning home from Missouri. He arrived home at midnight, and she passed at 3 a.m. on Thanksgiving Day.

As soon as the coffee cake came out of the oven, I whisked it into the car, and went to take some breakfast to Decker family, many of whom were by then in the barn to milk the cows. When everyone finally assembled in daughter Joann’s country kitchen, I asked if we could share a prayer together. With hands held, we offered prayers of thanksgiving for a life well-lived. We remembered our faith in Jesus, and begged for the comfort of the Holy Spirit. Before I could wrap up that prayer, I could feel hot tears flowing down my cheeks, and that unnerved me. *I* wasn’t supposed to be crying. The pastors I had known growing up (primarily my father) NEVER would have done that, as they were so stoic and strong. Embarrassed, I quietly apologized to the family. Joann’s response was that it was Jesus crying through me. She said, Jesus weeps with me all the time! Jesus wept with me when my second baby girl died two days after birth. Jesus wept tears of joy with me when my daughter was married and had her own baby girl. She went on, Jesus wept with me when I learned that my husband was unfaithful. And Jesus is weeping with us as the pain of Mama’s death stings so much.

To know, and be known by Jesus Christ, is an amazing gift. In his book, Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis investigates the question, “What does it mean to be a Christian?” A portion of his answer reads, “Now we begin to see what it is that the New Testament is always talking about. It talks about Christians ‘being born again’; it talks about them ‘putting on Christ’; about Christ ‘being formed in us’; and about our coming to ‘have the mind of Christ.’” I’ll paraphrase more of his conclusions. He says that if you think that being a Christian is merely reading about a good person who lived and died two thousand years ago, and trying to follow his teachings, you’re missing the point. Being a Christian is about allowing Jesus Christ to interfere with our very selves – destroying the old natural self, and transforming one’s mind and heart permanently into being a new “little Christ.” The word Christian literally means “little Christ.” And that is one who even in a small way, believes and lives as Jesus lives, and shares in God’s power, joy, knowledge and eternity.

Lewis concludes with the point that being a Christian doesn’t mean believing a list of doctrine about Jesus. Being a Christian means being transformed by Christ’s grace and love – becoming a new person, a new creature: becoming a little Christ.

Paul was trying to describe and affirm that concept of transformative faith in Jesus Christ as he wrote from jail to the young Christians at Phillipi. Just before today’s passage he implores them to “live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ...standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind. In today’s text he reminds them what it means to be a Christian: “Make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind....” He is referring to having the same mind and love as that of Christ. Being a little Christ!

Now, that is easier said than done. When one comes to belief in Christ's power to save a soul through forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life, one does not just become a little Christ like flicking a light switch. Being Jesus' followers, Christians, little Christs, means letting God remake, reshape, transform us bit by bit. And yes, I am describing a transformation that is beyond human ability. We cannot become a community of complete consensus and unity. What Paul is describing is humanly **impossible** – but it is possible with God!!

When a child or an adult wants to become skilled and accomplished at something it takes effort, repetitive practice, and receptivity to teaching and coaching. Whether the goal is become a ballerina, professional tennis player, engineer, parent, musician, welder, care giver, or any of the many valuable roles of life, it takes practice. Knowing Jesus Christ, and living as "little Christs" is no different. It takes practice, learning from the saints, repeated efforts to understand Scripture, and a willingness to keep trying even in the face of shortcomings.

I have a cherished friend who was the chaplain of a group I was in for a number of years. As chaplain, he was usually called upon to pray at the beginning and end of each gathering, when we learned of a difficult situation, when someone was tapped for a challenging task, and so on. My friend often ended his prayers by saying, "Jesus, we love you, we adore you. Amen." When my friend was asked why he offered that statement over and over again, he said that too often, his heart would begin to get hard, just in the short time between his prayers. He repeated that phrase to remind himself to renew his commitment to have the heart and mind of Christ, because Christ was renewing the commitment to forgive all our sins, to die for us, to live for us, and to walk with us.

Knowing Jesus Christ means tuning one's mind and heart into Christ's teachings and love over and over again. So that as "little Christs" there will be visible, real, and noticeable effects showing forth from us day by day. God is at work in us! God is enabling and equipping us to KNOW Jesus Christ, and to make Christ known in the world today.

"To Know Him is To Love Him"
(by Phil Spector)

*To know, know, know him is to love, love, love him
Just to see him smile, makes by life worthwhile
To know, know, know him is to love, love, love him
And I do.*

*I'll be good to him, I'll bring love to him
Everyone says there'll come a day when I'll walk alongside of him
Yes, just to know him is to love, love, love him
And I do*