

THE MIND OF CHRIST
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Krista and Tatiana Hogan are literally “of one mind.” These eleven-year-old twin girls are joined at the head, their skulls fused together, sharing what their neurosurgeon calls a “thalamic bridge” that links the sensory input of each of their brains to the other’s. Meaning in a very real sense that Krista and Tatiana think each other’s thoughts and feel each other’s feelings. They may even very well share one another’s consciousness.

Several years ago *New York Times Magazine* profiled example after example of this close connection between the twins. As infants, one of the girls would receive a pacifier for her crying, and the other girl would be soothed along with her, not needing her own pacifier.

When one of the girls is pricked for a blood test, the other starts to cry, as if she can feel the pain. When the more actively energetic Krista decides to power-slurp her juice, Tatiana puts her hand below her sternum and cries out, “Whoa!” as if she feels the sensation of her sister’s drinking. And Tatiana, who does not like ketchup, will try to scrape the condiment off her tongue when Krista is the one who is actually eating it. They are literally feeling the same thing that the other one feels, tasting what the other tastes, even as they maintain their own individual feelings and tastes.

And they look out for each other. Often, in the middle of the night, the girls will get up silently and walk to a sippy cup. Tatiana will pick up the cup and hand it to Krista, who then drinks from it before they crawl back into bed together. As if Tatiana feels Krista’s thirst as her own and responds. As if Krista’s drink is able to soothe Tatiana’s thirst, as well as her own.

Medical experts at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine are astonished by the connection between Tatiana and Krista. There is even evidence that each can verbalize what the other sees. When a physician held a stuffed turkey in front of Tatiana but outside her sister’s range of vision and then asked Krista what Tatiana was looking at, Krista guessed correctly that it was some kind of bird, even though she didn’t quite get that it was a turkey.

“It’s like they are one and two people at the same time,” says a professor at the College of Medicine. “It’s like [each girl] has one consciousness [her own] and [at the same time] can witness another’s [consciousness: her sister’s].” Their connection is quite miraculous, even for scientifically skeptical neurosurgeons.

But as miraculous as it is, the union of thought and feeling between Tatiana and Krista is but the most extreme iteration of ordinary human connection. For the past thirty years scientists who study brain activity have noted some pretty extreme examples of human empathy that come close to the experience of Krista and Tatiana. Scientists knew that a brain scan of a person experiencing a physically recognizable pain or joy will fire certain neurons in that person’s brain. But what they did not know until recently is that a brain scan of a person who is simply *observing* the person experiencing pain or joy will often fire similar neurons!

So, for example, if someone is sticking [insert parishioner name] with a pin, certain neurons will fire in their brain. And every one of us watching will have the same neurons firing in *our* brains. Meaning that the phrase, “I feel your pain,” may in fact be literally true in ways we are only just beginning to understand biologically. It may not be far from the truth to say that *all* of us—and not just Krista and Tatiana—are one person and yet multiple people at the same time, with a consciousness of our own, to be sure, and yet with the ability to witness—and even experience—the consciousness of everyone – and everything – else.

Theologically, we have understood this phenomenon for millennia. Jesus speaks of it in his final prayer for the disciples, just before he is about to leave them for good: that the disciples “may be one,” in the same way that Jesus and God “are one.” Paul speaks of this phenomenon in his letter to the Corinthians: “We have the mind of Christ,” he says, with the Spirit of God as our “thalamic bridge,” which enables us to know the spirit of our siblings in Christ.

“Having the mind of Christ,” the way Tatiana and Krista share a mind with one another means that Christ is quite literally the “head” of the church, to which every one of us is joined, just like Krista and Tatiana are joined at the head.

It means we settle solidly settled into our own conscious minds, our own thoughts and feelings and visions, our own brains and our own bodies and at the same time open ourselves to be fully present in visceral witness to the consciousness of our siblings in Christ. It means that we become so fully present in one another’s minds that we literally feel each other’s joys and concerns, that we literally think one another’s thoughts and perceive one another’s visions.

It means that in Christ we share a “thalamic bridge” of grace and insight into one another’s lives that borders on the miraculous. It means that if we but pay attention to the siblings to whom we are joined, we cannot help but get up in the middle of the night to grab the sippy cup for our thirsty sister. (We call it the cup of saving love in our table fellowship.) It means the hope and love we feel for one another can literally lift one another out of despair. Even when we don’t like the taste of the ketchup our sister decided to indulge!

“Having the mind of Christ” is particularly poignant for us at SPC as we continue our encounter with Race, Privilege and Faith. Last week, I understand, when the youth and I were confronting the legacy of racist redlining in Baltimore and its impact on Presbyterian congregations there, our congregation here was confronting the legacy of racist lynching in our own county and slavery in our own building, among our own people.

What does it mean for us “to have one mind, the mind of Christ,” when we are literally joined in faith with former slaves and former slave owners, right here in our own sanctuary?

The problem, for us, in the legacy of American Protestant Christianity, including but not limited to SPC, is that the white European consciousness has for centuries usurped the “thalamic bridge” uniting us to our siblings in Christ. Sometimes intentionally, with outright declarations of supremacy. Often unintentionally, because our history has been whitewashed, and we simply do not know the extent to which white privilege permeates our lives.

What our adult education and social justice committees are inviting us into, these next eight weeks, is an honest, painful, “waking up” among those of us who benefit from white privilege in order to relinquish our claim on the “thalamic bridge” that inhibits our ability to share “the mind of Christ” with all of our siblings throughout time and space.

The apostle Paul, was, himself, involved in a similar line of work in the early church, literally among former slaves and former slaveholders, literally among Jews and Greeks, literally among men and women. Paul’s former identity as a Jewish, male, possible slaveholder requires him to “check his privilege” every time he interacts with the fullness of the community of Christ. This is why he “decides to know nothing among the Corinthians except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” When he does interact with the full community, he does so “in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.”

We, who are white Christians, are learning to do the same, to relinquish our hold on the thalamic bridge uniting us to our siblings in Christ, praying for “the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God.”

And so what I want to ask of us in this season, what I think God is asking of us in this season, is to work with one another through every one of the challenging thoughts and feelings that arise, as we face this horrible history, rather than brushing them aside. To draw together and pay attention and offer the bread and wine that will satisfy the hunger and thirst of every part of this precious community. To look to the cross of our resurrected Lord and trust that we, too, will be glorified, as Christ has been glorified, and to know deep in our bones that the best days for our community may very well lie in front of us rather than behind us. But we have to live them honestly, even when the ketchup really gets on our nerves.

And when we do this work, maybe, just maybe, we will come close to having the mind of Christ.

Amen.