God is Coming

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11 (NRSVUE)

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

6 who, though he existed in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be grasped,
7 but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
assuming human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a human,
8 he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.
9 Therefore God exalted him even more highly
and gave him the name
that is above every other name,
10 so that at the name given to Jesus
every knee should bend,
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 Father.

The Word of God for the People of God!

Remember when you were in school and found a note someone had dropped in the hall? Remember how they usually were folded into a triangle? Or the creative ones made hexagons or even octagons! Remember reading them and trying to figure out who was writing to whom?

New Testament epistles are a lot like that. There's a name, but we don't know which John or Peter or James… Is it really Paul writing, or someone who knew Paul well and is summarizing his theology and faith, as is likely in Ephesians. We can recognize personal writing styles, sometimes distinct vocabulary and phrases, references to places or events or persons… Clues to who wrote to whom for what purpose.

Few scholars question whether Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians. He's in prison, either in Caesarea or in Rome, writing sometime five-to-ten years after he founded the Philippian church around 50 CE.

The church had sent a gift to Paul, and he's writing to thank them, but also to address an issue which isn't named or described: some disagreement or misunderstanding, we don't know. But his response is clear: he wants them to reconcile and restore the joy that had characterized their fellowship and enriched his own life.

For emphasis, he uses four expressions to describe that reconciliation: be of the same mind, have the same love, be in full accord, and be of one mind. He's calling, not for agreement on everything, but for a common attitude or mindset that prioritizes relationships over doctrine: "***Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus…"***

The writer of Ephesians describes such a fellowship: ***"…there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.*** **(4:4-6)**

But in Ephesians, unity is not uniformity, as is clear in the very next verse: ***"But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. … He granted that some are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.*** **(4:7, 11-13)**

The thinking is Paul's, but not the words. Paul usually dictated his letters. They had an informal, oral style. Ephesians is a formal written document.

But maybe the clearest statement of Paul's call to unity is today's reading in Philippians. He's quoting a beautiful hymn. It's one of my favorite texts of Scripture.

For a people needing a basis for unity, have the mind of Christ—the attitude of Christ, who ***"had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! (Philippians 5:5-6 MSG)***

He ***"set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave…"*** The Gospel of John puts it this way: "The Word became flesh…"

As I look at the life of Christ, I see several ways he **set aside** the privileges of deity. For example, he did so by **accepting limits**: neither he nor we can reach everyone. In Mark 10 a man asked "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus replied, "You know the commandments…" the man said, "I've kept them all my life." And Jesus said, "Then sell everything you have and give it to the poor," and the man went away sadly, for he had many possessions. I wonder if Jesus wanted to run after him and say, "Wait a minute, let's reconsider!" But the human Jesus accepted his limits.

For us, this means we're going to foul things up sometimes. We're not perfect (news flash!); we get "off course." We have limits.

For us (and for the human Jesus) it means we need strength from others. We can't (nor do we need to) go it alone. Jesus said, "I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructs me." John 8:28. At the Table with his disciples he used the metaphor of vine and branches (John 15:5). We need him and we need each other.

Am I able to accept my own limits, or do I still "cling to Godness" by trying to be Super Pastor or Super Dad or Super Grandpa or by always saying, "I just have to work this out on my own?"

And as I look at the life of Christ, he **took on** the status of a slave in several ways. He did so by **Accepting Uncertainty**. This means I can embrace my own humanity and offer myself as I am, trusting that God will accept me as I am, but won't leave me as I am! God's grace can transform me into ***the measure of the full stature of Christ.***

As I look at the life of Christ, I see he **set aside** the privileges of deity by **accepting vulnerability**. This means we can lower our defenses enough to risk getting hurt, being misunderstood, etc. Jesus was vulnerable to betrayal by Judas, denial by Peter, abandonment by his disciples, and crucifixion by the Jewish oligarchy.

And as I look at his life I see he **took hold** of the form of a slave by **Caring And Loving**. This is Agape love—investing oneself in the life of another person for his or her sake. Loving is the ultimate vulnerability, and Jesus exemplified it even to

persons who didn't deserve it.

And Christ **set aside** the privileges of deity by **being available**. For us this means allowing others to get close to us, both physically and emotionally—to give them space and time in our lives.

Christ **took hold** of the form of a slave by **empathizing**: sensing others' feelings—identifying—sharing pain, joy, excitement. And he shared his true feelings (which is also an act of vulnerability). At the grave of Lazarus, Jesus wept. When he confronted money changers in the temple, he was angry, he let them know it!

And Christ **set aside** the privileges of deity by **rejecting status**. Between me and anyone else there are more similarities than differences. There is no room in the Christian life for arrogance. Jesus washed his disciples' feet.

And he **took hold** of the form of a slave by **accepting interdependence**. He told his disciples, "I do not call you servants, I call you friends." (John 15:15) I'm not the Lone Ranger or Superman! We'll go through this together.

He **set aside** the privileges of deity by **being spontaneous.** He had a plan, but he also could improvise. Undergirding his plan was a set of values and a guiding faith. In Gethsemane he knew who he was and was in touch with his own feelings and was honest with them—even to himself and with God!

And it was in Gethsemane that we see most clearly how he **took on** the form of a slave: he **accepted commitment**. Commitment is always intentional. Love is an intentional decision that emerges out of all of the above. It means being focused and responsible. It means being prepared.

So, on this Palm Sunday we celebrate that Jesus comes, not only to Jerusalem, but also to us, wherever we are. God does not remain above us—aloof and detached. In Jesus, God comes to us, identifies with us, stands with us, connects with us. And we can take on the mind of Christ, who…

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as something to be grasped,
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Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Amen!

Invitation to the Table

We come to this table today in an awkward situation. With shouts of Hosanna we have celebrated the glory of the coming King. We celebrate with all of Jerusalem the anticipated triumph. Yet as we come to the table, we know the triumph is not the one the Israelites expected. The triumph came not as the world does, but only as God could do. So, do we let that reality subdue our message of celebration and hope? I say "no," we celebrate all the more because we know the rest of the story, all of the glory and the hope which is to come. This week there will be ample time to remember the laws, and I hope you will, but today we lift the cup in celebration. Hosanna! **B**lessed is the One who gives of himself, for the sake of God and each of us. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

God of every triumph, Palm Sunday reminds us of the unexpected, yet fully present, King of Kings. Jesus didn't look like the Messiah your people hoped for. The way He entered Jerusalem, riding a young donkey was an unexpected symbol of peace, which didn't align with their expectations of a military conqueror.

Nurturing Spirit, much of our daily lives don't align with our expectations. So much doesn't make sense. Today, help us embrace the unexpected entrance of Jesus. Grant us grace to embrace the incredible truth that he is our peace. Remind us, as we navigate difficult days and trying times, that his peace is offered to us.

Lord of Peace, on this Palm Sunday, inspire us to share the message of justice and peace Jesus brought to Jerusalem. Empower us to be instruments of Your peace, to advocate for the marginalized and to work for justice for all your creation.

In this Holy Week, strengthen us to be faithful in our walk with Jesus, not averting our eyes from the suffering around us but responding as Jesus did: with loving service that meets human need and heals human hurt. Grant us grace to love even those who do their worst, and use our expressions of love to heal their brokenness.

From the joyful procession of Palm Sunday through the agony of Maundy Thursday and the sorrow of Good Friday and the ultimate triumph of Easter, remind us that your profound love endures all trials and triumphs over all hardship.

Hosanna in the Highest! Amen.

- Mass shooting in Russia
- Russia/Ukraine
- Israel/Hammas+
- Donna's father
- Bud
- Dian
- Kelly
- Bill Schlientz
- Shane