

Palm Sunday, St James Episcopal, 03-24-2013. "Emptied to All Fullness", notes by Rev. Dr. Rod Spidahl

Intro, Phil 2:1-4, is one sentence in the Greek. Phil 2:5-11 is the second . . . we learned in our Total Ministry Team bishops material that our epistle reading for Palm Sunday is likely one of the ancient, and earliest hymns of the church—notice how it is written in some Bibles, like the NRSV; it is written as a song would be written.

What leads up to it (in the whole epistle) and what follows it, is a personal letter, filled with care, love and brotherly advice . . . but the style of this short section is different, markedly different. "It is constructed with the utmost care. Each clause is balanced against another and has all the characteristics of a hymn or poem, composed deliberately." While this may have been an early Christian hymn, it fits so well with the letter, and the combination of deep spirituality and God-awareness leading to life-practices that exude Christ that it may well have been composed by Paul.

In any case, let us just listen in on a translation that combines insights by Moule and Lightfoot, . . .

***Sentence #1 (vs1-4) If your experiences and life in Christ speaks to your hearts with any persuasive force; if loves exerts any convincing power upon you; if your life in the Spirit is a living reality; if you have any affectionate yearnings of heart or tender mercies of compassion, then listen and obey what this work in you is really saying. In this sense of joy you've given, fill my cup of gladness to overflowing.***

***Live in unity among yourselves, animated by an equal and interconnected love, being knit together with one another in all your sympathies and kindred affections of family, united in thoughts and in aims. Do nothing to promote the goals of one party or faction or interpretation and do nothing to satisfy your own personal or independent vanities. Rather, be humble-minded and esteem your neighbors more highly than yourselves. Let not everyone seek his/her own interests or wants but consult always the wants and interests of others in mutuality.***

***Sentence #2 (vs5-11) Reflect and embody among yourselves (local church), the mind of Christ Jesus, being humble in his way of being humble . . . in that although He existed before all things and worlds as Eternal God, yet He did not cling stubbornly to His rights and privileges to be on equality status with God, but willingly set aside his weight of glory emptying and hiding his divinity in the human nature of a servant, taking totally the form of a servant, becoming man and then, going so far as to humble himself in becoming obedient to death, even death at the most humiliating and shameful form in being crucified . . . wherefore God highly exalted him, raising Him to the Title and Name above all Names [Sovereign LORD] so that at the Name of Jesus, all created things in heaven, earth and in the place of the dead shall acknowledge in submitting and praising Him, declaring publicly that Jesus Christ is LORD to the ultimate Glory of God the Father.***

What shall we make of these weighty words? Let me suggest a few things:

The best and weightiest theology is applied theology, coming directly out of Christ's suffering and death and resurrection. Simply stated, for followers of Christ, the crucifixion defines love more than any nice talk—spend time at the start of each day dwelling on it. . . daily living is Christ crucified in us and Christ crucified among us in community, Christ-community, ever showing God's presence as we willingly give up our rights to position, power, privilege, gain, so that Christ may be manifested in our daily lives! Paul says it elsewhere as God's Spirit reminding us, in all things, God's grace is sufficient for us for His power is perfected in our weakness; when we seem weakest it is then we may in fact be strongest. Christ was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by God's power, likewise, we are weak in him yet by God's power we will live with him to serve others (2 Cor 12:9-13:4) Or how Paul says we are daily being given over to death, for Jesus sake, so that the life of Jesus can be manifested in our mortal bodies (2 Cor 4:11). And Jesus saying, "if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself/herself and take up his cross daily and follow me for whoever would save his/her life, will lose it but whoever loses his life for me (ongoing) will find and save it (Luke 9:23).

The word applies both to our individual spirituality and our congregation, parish or denominational reflection to others. . . we are to show a unity of love that prefers hearing the other, upbuilding the others, in Christ so that we live in such a way as to reflect this kind of Christ humility, that is, one that serves out of love.

Jesus did this for ALL, EVERYWHERE (notice that every knee and tongue will confess Him, in heaven, on earth and under the earth) so that we too are not to show partiality in our loving others but to do good to all as we carry and reflect the attitude and love of Christ as our supreme mark of being a Christian. Doctrinal distinctive regarding modes and ways of baptizing bow to this mark of self-giving love; words we add or subtract from the Lord's Supper, forming distinctive doctrines will bow to the simple declaration of the Name of Jesus; statements about the election that create privilege rather than responsibility bow to the call to humility as Christ lived.

There is the story told to an audience I happened to be in at Amsterdam 2000, a gathering of over 10,000 itinerant evangelists, where Luis Palau, a member of Billy Graham association, spoke of his struggle to accept the faith of some

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Roman Catholic nuns (for whatever reasons). AS they were together in prayer and worship he noted the tears and the exclamations of "thank you Jesus" and was humbled as well to let his arrogance and judgment go . . .

What rights and privileges does this call to humility challenge in our lives? Jesus quoted Psalm 86:6 as God speaking "I said, 'you are all gods' to explain how he could be called God's Son. We have been given amazing privileges and filled with love to the "measure of the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:19) and "given fullness in Christ who is the head over every power and authority" (Colossians 2:10).

Here is where Christianity 101, the word on the street version, begins or ends . . .

Love your enemies . . . even if you are a champion fighter, turn the other cheek, though they do not deserve it in your eyes, go the extra mile for them because Christ purchased them with his blood . . . pray for them that misuse you at work or in relationships . . . bless those that curse you secretly . . .

But then, the faith, the Christian church, can get a very bad name by those who use the name of Christ as an excuse to cover sin or laziness or to be disrespectful, expecting and even demanding that others simply ignore unhealthy behavior . . . no! This text is one that offers the example of a life to imitate and Christ passed on a lifestyle, not a mere philosophy of what Bonhoeffer called "cheap grace" or if you will, greasy grace, but a life of grace acting in responsibility of the love shown by God.

Ahhh, so then if they bear the name brother or sister in Christ, if they confess Christ, as Paul says here, "if there is any of God's love, any of the Spirit's work, any affection or experienced love from God . . . then make my joy full by obeying . . . and not breaking the unity in a group by either wrong words or selfish ignoring of our tasks. (2 Thessalonians 3:6)

In this we can hear words to all Christians "be imitators of God and live a life of love JUST AS CHRIST LOVED US AND GAVE HIMSELF UP FOR US" (Ephesians 5:2)

"husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" In this we can hear that wives can win over husbands, not by haranguing but by example, reverence, worship and faith that does not give in to fear! (1 Peter 3:1). "Bosses [who have rights and power to threaten economic security, demean or damage workers in the workplace or take unfair advantage in situations of power difference] do not be harsh with your employees for you have a boss in heaven" (Eph 6:9)

WE can hear in this, if we listen, that fathers [who have rights of size, power, experience and presence that can ruin a child] are not to expect too much or embitter their children (Eph 6:4). No one is to be harsh or disrespectful but speaking the truth in love, we will grow up into this example of Christ-like humility.

For church leaders of all kinds, let us not forget to show that there is really only one body of Christ in the world, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father, one table of the LORD open to all who will examine themselves in humility and "call upon his name" (1 Corinthians 1:3-5;11:28). Can we show humility in our doctrines as in our works?

If we want Jesus to be lifted up among others, here, then we are called to let him be lifted up over us and our opinions of right and wrong. Let this mind be in us, not as the crowd upon his entry to Jerusalem, who thought He was coming to free them from unjust taxes, secular rulers, dominant family members, the pains of growing old or the consequences of mistakes made in one's youth . . . No, let us welcome Him as we find Him in the Gospels, complicated, demanding, difficult, challenging us and calling us to know one thing, above all . . . according to Scripture, one day, whoever we are and all those we have met or known in our lifetime will acknowledge, that Jesus is LORD. Let us not live out of sync with what is and in denial of what will be . . . let us live today in confession and faith, knowing that it has been granted to us, not only to believe in Him, but to suffer for Him as well, struggling daily with letting the cross be more than blurry historical event or something we date our calendars by . . . 2013 AD the year of our Lord. Let us present our bodies, a living sacrifice to him, wholly and acceptable, which is our daily and ongoing spiritual worship, not conforming to the world around us but being transformed by renewing our minds in Christ and in his work for us . . . this is what love is and this is where life begins, at the end of ourselves we begin to discover God's mercy. Hosanna!

Remember, these verses are meant to be sung and recast in new tunes so God's people worship in them!

Everyone is included! Isaiah 45:23 is Paul's reference! "every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that only in the LORD are righteousness and strength!" These astounding verses mean that Yahweh is in Christ Jesus! LORD God is the Name and Jesus is the LORD God! The Greek word in Phil 2:6, form is morphe' or the substance, not merely appearance. "He was in very substance, God"

All the nations are always remembered and included by God! (See Genesis chapters 10-11, the Table of Nations).