

Sermon on **Philippians 2:5-11** – Palm Sunday – 3.28.21

St. Paul's Lutheran – New Ulm, MN – Pastor N. Scharf

What are we supposed to do with Palm Sunday? - Marvel at Jesus' humility? Imitate him? Worship him with loud Hosannas? Be shocked by Jesus, be changed by all he did, and change our lives and have it impact every day, even every thought, word, and deed we do? Yes, actually, all of that, in the right order of course.

**Bend a Knee and Confess Jesus Christ is Lord.**

**1) For his Work for us.**

**2) For the work we get to do for each other.**

Fascinating, isn't it? God in the flesh, Jesus – of whom Isaiah says, "Nothing in his appearance that we should desire him," (Is. 53) but he had just healed a blind man outside Jericho. He stayed with friends in Bethany and was headed to Jerusalem. The swell of the city was growing due to the upcoming High festival of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This Sunday, the Sabbath rest being over, the city was coming alive again for business, festivals, and everything – like hosting the Olympics with opening ceremony just a few days away. Jesus arranges for a young donkey and rides it into Jerusalem just like Zechariah prophesied. Crowds praise him with palms and proclaim prophetic names reserved for the Messiah. Those who hated him sneered, chiding him for allowing such words to be spoken. Those who had no clue asked who he was. His disciples and the mobs from the miracle working praised him as Messiah. Six days later he would be killed on a cross accursed by crowds of people and cursed by God the Father. It's like his disciples had all these puzzle pieces and were trying to fit them all together, but just could not at the time. Palm Sunday – fascinating day as we look back at it and the Holy Spirit through the word of God has put all the puzzle pieces together for us. Jesus knew just what he was doing even though most everybody else struggled with what it all really meant.

Paul knew what it was all about and he told the Philippians, and it was really the heart of his message – Jesus, true God in the flesh, cursed and killed for us, risen and ruling now for us, and we praise him and live for him. **Bend a Knee and Confess Jesus Christ is Lord. 1) For his Work for us. 2) For the work we get to do for each other.**

It has been a little bit of a sensitive and maybe even stressful few weeks, at least in my brain, as we as a staff start to plan for ministry this summer and fall and in the new church year, but we are doing so with it in mind that Pastor Sutton will be retired. Pastor Sutton is not Jesus, but he is a gift from Jesus who has served faithfully and used his gifts in coordination, organization, and administration among many other gifts among us. It has been nice. And now we've had three calls returned and whoever the Lord blesses us with won't be a Pastor Sutton 2.0. They will have their unique gifts and abilities. Change, whether good or bad, can bring an amount of stress and sensitivity which can also lead to difficulties and "hiccups" among staff, members, ministries. Paul knew this throughout his ministry. He addresses it head on. It was not his first rodeo, wouldn't be his last.

*"In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus."* Ok, slap on the WWJD (What Would Jesus Do) bracelets and let's do this. Right, we can, can't we? Pretty quickly that mindset can devolve into another set of rules that we have no power to follow as a bunch of sinner saints, saints by God's grace – called so from our baptism clothed with Christ, but also sinners who all too often listen to our sinful natures and desires, more than we would like to admit. And Christianity just becomes moralizing – worried most about behavior and the veneer rather than the heart. No. Paul points us look to Jesus Christ, his life, ministry, state of humiliation and state of exaltation to not just show us an example, but our salvation and rescue – our forgiveness won and our reason for living and loving one another.

*"In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used for his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*

Yeah, the WWJD bracelet clasp breaks at this point. *"Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used for his own advantage; rather he made himself nothing."* We are always

in a church of sorts listening to somebody. All this world screams at us is if you can get an advantage – take it! If you are stronger use it. If you are better, rise to the top to gain more. If you are the best, then people will praise you, love you, honor you. I have not just treated what the airplane attendant told me “first put on your own oxygen mask, and then assist the person next to you” as an only in emergency mantra, I have too often made it my life’s goal. I will get mine, fill up, and if there is more than enough for me, I will consider sharing. Maybe you have found that “you do you” is not just a permission slip for some needed self-care, but it turns into our selfish mantra – I do me, and if I am good, maybe I can help others. Even the good things we do for others often take on a tinge of selfishness. Did it ever bother you if you helped someone and they did not thank you? It is not just the etiquette faux pas that makes us mad. It is that we did something for “the likes of them,” and they must think themselves better than us or deserving of our deed. “Well let me tell them something” .... let’s just stop there – enough said? We need more than an example.

We need a Savior, a substitute in life and death. Jesus is true God over all, but he chose not to make use of that to win popularity or boost himself up. He *made himself nothing*. He made heaven and earth, but did not have a plot of land to call his own, or a place to lay his head, and he was not worried about it. He would not perform a miracle for his own benefit. It was always for the benefit or the boost in faith of his followers. He would not change stones into bread during a forty day fast, but he fed five thousand to teach his disciples to trust in God to provide. He endured constant criticism from Pharisees, Sadducees, Sanhedrin, but had patience left over and joy in taking little ones into his arms and blessing them. And then everyone deserted him, one even betrayed him, the nation to whom he was sent in fulfillment of God’s promise stood aligned against him. And the secular rulers abandoned any sense of fairness.

*“And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!”* Cursed by the people, **“Crucify him! Crucify him!”** Accursed by God the Father, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** (Cursed is everyone hung on a tree – Deut. 21, Gal. 3). Not for his own sin, but for our selfishness, our sinfulness, our pride, our self-serving passionate desires which are against God’s will. Jesus paid penalty and prison of hell for you, died, and was buried. He rose from the grave to assure you your sin has been paid for. You are forgiven. You are freed. You are God’s own child – named so at your baptism, fed, and nourished by his Word and Sacrament - all because of Jesus’ humility!

*“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father.”* There will be a day when all bow the knee. On Palm Sunday it wasn’t the case. Even today, we feebly bow – sometimes with full weight on our knee, sometimes just playing along while hiding pride and prejudice in our hearts. In hell, there will be full acknowledgement as when Jesus descended to hell to proclaim his victory. In heaven there is perfect praise from the angels and from all believers who died trusting in their Savior Jesus and live with him. One day all will praise him.

Fellow brother and sister in Christ, praise him now, not just with loud Hosannas, but in your life of service. *“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.”* Paul even says in vv.3-4, *“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others.”*

As an early hymn of praise use your words and actions to each other– a preview of the songs we’ll sing, the service we’ll render in heaven. Do not devalue the great gifts God has given you or fail to utilize them, but think more highly of others – look to their interests and what would be best for them. This will take patience, more than you have. This will take denying yourself not just from sin, but to serve and be selfless, which will need more motivation than a nylon wristband with some letters. The strength will come from the humble one who rode into Jerusalem on a colt the foal of a donkey. He rules and reigns for you. He will strengthen you by Word and Sacrament with his forgiveness and guidance. Look to him. He will help you be of the same mind – strengthening you, forgiving you, and giving you joy in service. Marvel at Jesus’ humility. Sing your hosannas because he did it all for you. Imitate him in joyful service, for the day is coming when we will bend the knee in heaven and rejoice to be at our Savior’s side *to the glory of God the Father*. **Bend a Knee and Confess Jesus Christ is Lord. 1) For his Work for us. 2) For the work we get to do for each other.**