

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Philippians 2:5-11

⁵Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. ⁶He 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. ⁷Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! ⁸Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that: a crucifixion. ⁹Because of that obedience, God lifted him high and honored him far beyond anyone or anything, ever, ¹⁰so that all created beings in heaven and on earth—even those long ago dead and buried—will bow in worship before this Jesus Christ, ¹¹and call out in praise that he is the Master of all, to the glorious honor of God the Father.

A little boy was sick on Palm Sunday and stayed home from church with his mother. His father returned from church holding a palm branch. The little boy was curious and asked, "Why do you have that palm branch, Dad?"

"You see, when Jesus came into town, everyone waved palm branches to honor Him, so we got palm branches today."

The little boy replied, "The only Sunday I miss is the Sunday that Jesus shows up!"

How wonderful it is when children recognize that Jesus really is someone special. On that day when Jesus rode into Jerusalem...everyone knew he was special; not only the children. He was treated like royalty. Jesus...the miracle worker...great teacher and preacher...friend to all...impressed many people who were there that day. Some saying that all he did and say pointed to him being the warrior Messiah who came to set his people free from their oppressors. Perhaps a smaller group saw something deeper in him...but could not quite yet put their finger on what made him so special...but they were drawn to him.

Today's scripture from the letter to the Philippians invites us to dig deeper into knowing what made Jesus so special. In this letter written by the Apostle Paul, we find him addressing a problem they were having...and was telling them they needed to make an attitude adjustment. The church in Philippi was actually one of - if not the favorite church that Paul visited.

Theologians believe Paul wrote this letter near the end of one of his times in prison. Even though Paul was in prison, he somehow was able to stay in touch with what was happening in the mission field. Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians because of some information he received that the church in Philippi was having some problems that was dividing the church. We don't know what the problems were exactly, but Paul had an answer for how to put an end to their discord.

In verse five, Paul instructed the Christians in Philippi that they should think of themselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. Think about it...how did Jesus think of himself? What does it mean for us to think of ourselves in the same way?

As Paul began it is important to understand that he chose his words carefully so the people would clearly understand his message. He tried to explain to them that Jesus was God incarnate and at the same time he was human when he walked this earth. I want to give you a little Greek lesson now to help us better understand what Paul meant. In verse six, Paul uses the Greek verb, "huparchein," which means, "being"; however the meaning for "being" used here is different from the meaning we usually think of today... **being to us means a person**...our English word "being" just happens to be the best single word we have in the English language to use for the Greek word's translation.

The Greek word, "huparchein," is used to describe **that which is the very essence of a person. It is that part of a person that cannot be changed.** It describes that part of who we are that remains the same even though the circumstances around us may change. So what Paul was trying to communicate was that, Jesus, at his very essence...in that part of him that could not be changed...was God. Nothing could change that. Yet Jesus never used his deity status to glorify himself; nor did he use it to get his own way.

Paul also told the Christians that Jesus was in the **"form" of God...and in the "form" of a human.** He used two Greek words for the word we translate as "form". There is the Greek word, **"morphe," which he used in reference to that part of Jesus that was God and is the essential form that never changes;** and then there is the Greek word **"schema," that Paul used when he spoke about the humanness of Jesus and is the outward form of Jesus that changed from time to time or in circumstance to circumstance.** An example of "morphe" is that we are all in the form of humans and there is nothing that can change that. We cannot become a dog or a car or anything other than human. However, if we are talking about "schema", then we mean that when we are born, we are in the form of babies... who grow into children...teenagers...adults...and older adults...so our outward form...our bodies... almost continuously changes.

In Jesus' case...he was divine and that would never change. However, as a man he changed from a child to an adult. Circumstances around him made him feel different emotions like sadness and joy...anger and peace. The bottom line is that Jesus was both divine and human at the same time.

When we understand the translation of the Greek words Paul used in these verses, we better understand the power and depth of the words he wrote in verse seven. He tells us that Jesus knew exactly who he was...he knew he was divine...he knew he was the presence of God-with-Us...yet Jesus pushed aside all of the privileges of being a deity so that he would experience what it is like to be human and so people would actually listen to him. Jesus did not vacillate between being God and being human. Jesus gave all of that up just to live among us. He taught us by word and example what it meant to be a child of God. Then to top all of that off, he died on the cross as the final sacrifice for the forgiveness of the sins of humanity for then and for generations yet to come. He knew the role he was to play in God's plan and he didn't try to escape it. Jesus gave **everything** for us...EVERYTHING!

That's humility! Jesus had a servant's heart. He was all about caring for and thinking about the needs of others. He was all about pointing the way to God, even to the point of loving his enemies, including those who nailed him to the cross. Jesus is the epitome of humility.

During the summer of 1778, a British battleship dropped anchor in the harbor of Nantucket Island, off the New England coast. William Rotch, a leader of the Quaker community on the island, knew that the ship's purpose was to plunder the town.

With the consent of his fellow citizens, Rotch formed a one-man welcoming committee, and greeted Sir Conway-Etherege, the British commander, at the pier. He invited Conway-Etherege home to dinner.

After a pleasant meal, the commander decided to get on with his business. "We're here to plunder," he told Rotch. "As you can see, your little hamlet is completely at our mercy. Where shall we start?"

"I don't know of a better place than here at my house," said Rotch. "I'm better able to bear the loss than anyone else. We have some silver plate, some good, serviceable blankets, and food supplies in the cellar."

Conway-Etherege didn't know what to do. He had never come across this response before! "Tell me," he said, "are there any more men like you on Nantucket?"

"Oh, yes, many better men," said Rotch.

"Well, I want to meet them," Conway-Etherege answered.

So Rotch took him around to meet a shopkeeper who had given 400 barrels of flour to the poor the winter before, and another one who had given away blankets and shoes.

"Would you like to meet more of our people?" asked Rotch.

"Oh, no," replied Conway-Etherege. "I can hardly believe there are three such men as you in the world. A whole street full of them would be too much."

So, Conway-Etherege went back to this ship, and Nantucket was saved. Sometimes it is difficult to remain humble, especially when the circumstances and the people around us throw negativity at us. Jesus is our perfect example of humility in all circumstances. Knowing who we are and WHOSE we are can help us stay at peace with ourselves and be humble. Paul tells us we need to be like Jesus and have a spirit of humility.

Jesus also was obedient to God...which goes hand-in-hand with humility. He did not let his own whims and desires take precedence. He was obedient to God even when it took him to the cross. You may remember that Jesus did go to God to ask God whether it was possible to change the plan, but in the end, Jesus did say, "Let your will, not mine be done."

Jesus experienced favor with God and humanity because he lived with the spirit of humility and obedience to God...fueled by the love of God in his heart. In the end, Jesus won the hearts of men and women in his day, and he continues to win the hearts of people today.

Back near the beginning of this sermon I pointed out that Paul instructed the Christians in Philippi that they should think of themselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. Are we ready to embrace a spirit of humility and obedience? Are we ready to think of and care for others before we think of ourselves? It won't be an easy road to travel...others won't understand...but then it's all about following Jesus that really matters. Right? Remember, Jesus had you and me lovingly in his heart as he rode triumphantly into Jerusalem on that momentous day long ago...knowing what was coming at the end of the week.

Ruth Daugherty wrote in "Issues of Leadership into the 21st Century," "...A Roman leader would have ridden in a chariot pulled by magnificent white stallions...

Jesus entered the city on a donkey, and a borrowed one!

A political leader would have been surrounded by security guards who would have kept crowds from close physical contact to prevent any personal harm to him...

Jesus was surrounded by his disciples representing many walks of life and rode into the midst of the people, almost at their height.

A military leader would have galloped along the road, passing the crowds with perhaps a wave of the hand or a nod of the head if there were any recognition at all...

Jesus on a donkey moved slowly with the people, accompanying the people, as well as accompanied by the people.

A religious leader in traditional, appropriate priestly robes would have moved sedately through the crowds surrounded by an orderly contingency of other religious leaders who would've prevented anyone who was unclean from touching him...

Jesus, dressed in his usual attire, moved humbly through the crowds, surrounded by his diverse band of disciples, not shrinking from the touch of anyone.

Hosanna, we shout with the crowd. Hosanna to our Savior! Amen.