

In our Epistle lesson this morning, we have the second of a series of 4 readings from the Epistle the Philippians. And in this section of Philippians, Paul seems to be quoting an ancient Christian hymn, a hymn that predates Philippians. In fact, this may be the oldest chunk, the oldest written material in the New Testament. This section is sometimes nicknamed, "The Christ Hymn."

But Paul is quoting it for a reason. Paul is dealing with a tremendous mystery, the love of Jesus Christ. In this Paul is exhorting the members of church in Philippi to love each other with humility.

Paul starts by saying: "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others."¹

This is where the rubber hits the road in being a part of a Christian community: putting other's interests before your interests. In other words, put love for others way out in front of your own selfish desires. Why? Because that's what Jesus did.

To drive that point home, Paul says, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus."² Remember Jesus' love and example. Act accordingly.

And then, Paul talks about Jesus' love for us. And he does so by quoting a hymn. He talks about how Jesus did not act selfishly. Paul's prose falls short. In the fact of the tremendous mystery of Jesus' love and actions, Paul has to look to poetry. Paul is saying basically, 'Y'all know this song. But look again at the meaning. Look at what Christ Jesus did.'

And the hymn begins,
 "Though he was in the form of God,
 (Jesus) did not regard equality with God
 as something to be exploited"³

Have you ever thought about what that means? In the beginning, Jesus Christ was part of God. Before the universe was created, Christ was God. In the first chapter of John, we're told,

"He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made."⁴

Jesus Christ started at the top. He was equal with God. He was God.

And yet, in Philippians, we hear, though Jesus was God,
 "(he) did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited."

¹ Phil 2:3-4

² Phil 2:5

³ Phil 2:6

⁴ John 1:2-3

We exploit our privileges. We hang onto them and clutch them tight. Yet Christ, with all the privileges in the universe did not exploit his. In fact, just the opposite.

"He emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness."⁵

The master of the universe gives up all his privileges and becomes a slave. He does this to show us what God's love is like.

In the Disney movie, *Aladdin*, the Genie complains about being stuck in his lamp. He describes being a Genie as, "Total cosmic power... itty-bitty living space."

That's what's happening here. The Lord of the universe becomes a human being. Total cosmic power. And the itty-bitty living space of a human body.

And even in becoming a human, he doesn't start at the top. He doesn't make himself a full-grown emperor. Instead, he starts at the bottom.

He becomes an embryo. Then a fetus. Then an infant. Then a toddler. Then a child. Then a teenager. Then an adult. And not a wealthy powerful one, but a lower middle class one.

Have you ever thought about what Christ Jesus gave up? In heaven wherever he was, countless angels would sing his praises. Now he walks down the road and people ignore him. Now he has to listen to his mother. Now he has to eat and sleep like everyone else. Now he is subjected to hunger, and thirst, and pain, and sadness.

But he didn't stop there. He humbled himself even more.
"And being found in human form, he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death —
even death on a cross."⁶

Humbled to the point of dying on a cross. Crucifixion is not a quick, painless death. Crucifixion is one of the most tortuous means of execution ever devised. Jesus didn't just die. He got to experience all of the gruesome sensations accompanying a death by slow torture.

Was Jesus looking out for himself when he gave up the power and position of God? Not hardly. Was it beneficial to Jesus to become a human? No way. Did it do him any good to be crucified? Of course not.

Paul says, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus."

What kind of mindset is that? It's a mindset of sacrifice. It's a mindset of doing things for others instead of yourself. It's a mindset of giving up your own comforts and

⁵ Phil 2:7

⁶ Phil 2:7b

privileges and power on behalf of other. It's a mindset of servanthood. It's a mindset of true love.

And because of that, God raised Jesus and gave him every superlative privilege:
"Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father."⁷

In his human life, Jesus mirrored God's love. And in his resurrected life, he mirrors God's glory.

And if you're going to truly be Jesus' disciples, Paul is saying, then you have to do what he did. You have to set aside your privileges and power and wealth and status so that you can serve others. And for Paul, this was not just theoretical. Paul was writing these words from prison. Paul was awaiting trial for a capital offense.

Which is a reminder: It's not easy being a disciple. It sets you in opposition to the values of this world.

The world says, "Privilege. Power. Possessions."
Christ says, "Service. Suffering. Sacrifice."

Christ came into the world to serve. He calls his followers to serve.

Jesus won by losing.
Jesus gained by giving.

Let that same mindset be in you that was in Christ Jesus.

⁷ Phil 2:9-11