

"Imitators Of Christ"

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Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Philippians 2:1-11

A mother was making breakfast for her two little boys. The boys starting arguing over who was going to get the first pancake, and so their mom saw this as the perfect opportunity for a moral lesson. “Now boys, hold on a minute. Let me tell you: If Jesus were sitting here, He would say, ‘Let my brother have the first pancake. I can wait.’”

The two children sat silently for a moment. Then the five year-old, turned to his younger brother and said, “Okay, you be Jesus!”

There can be no doubt, that what Paul is talking about this morning, is so radically...so different from the way the world works, and from the way we think and act, that it can be almost...overwhelming.

I mean, think about all the things you have been taught about the way things work in this world. For example, I can remember hearing the following, not too inspiring advice, when I was growing up: “Look out for number one.” Do you remember that?

The basic idea behind this, is that we should look out for ourselves rather than the needs of others. That we are number one!!! Well, that I am number one, not all of you.

Or, there is another saying which goes like this: “Do unto others as they would do unto you...but do it first.” You know, “Get in that first punch.” You should race to the top—no matter who might get hurt or left out in the process. I mean, it’s survival of the fittest, right?

There can be no doubt, that we live in a place filled with people and institutions, “Who” don’t care one iota about the needs and well-being of others. It’s every man, every woman and every child for him or herself. But Paul says, **“Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”**

This worldview is much different than the dog-eat-dog animalistic lives many of us have become accustomed to.

Now, to put today’s Scripture in context, we need to look at what was happening at the Church of Philippi, which prompted Paul to write this letter in the first place. Because you see, things weren’t all peachy keen...as people were being people...and the church was already messing up. There was division taking root.

Apparently, these two women in the church had a falling out. And this falling out was causing all kinds of strife. Feelings were getting hurt. The gossip mill was running strong. People were beginning to take sides. The war had already begun.

The two women, who were at odds with one another, weren’t terrible people. They just had a disagreement, a misunderstanding. Then, one thing led to another, and...I’m sure this kind of thing has never happened to any of you, right? Yeah right!

It’s all part of the human experience is it not?

But it is the kind of thing that rips churches apart. It gets in the way of our walk with Jesus, and it tears at the seams of the Church’s mission to serve the world in humility and love.

We get side-tracked by these things. And before we know it, we are like a run-away train headed off the tracks. And a lot of people get hurt as a result. And a lot of Kingdom work gets set aside and left undone.

These kinds of factions and angry divisions also cause those on the outside of the church to say: “Those Christians are no different than

anyone else. Why would I want to be a part of that? I get enough of that junk at my job, or at home or wherever else.”

Now there can be no doubt that Christians are no better than anyone else.

Of course, when we fight, when we demand our rights or demand that others bow down and ask forgiveness for hurting our feelings, we certainly are acting as if we are better than others, are we not?

So, in Chapter 4 of Philippians we are told that two women, whom Paul describes as his **“fellow workers,”** and people whose **“names are in the book of life”** are none the less not acting much like the Christ that they claim as Lord.

Have you ever done that?

I do it every day. I can be such a mess sometimes. What a sinner I can be...what a self-centered sinner I am. You see, it’s a miracle God even puts up with me at all. But do you know what...He does!

In any event, Paul writes to the Philippian Church: **“I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. Yes, I ask you [to] help these women get along.”** Help them to be **“like minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.”** May they **“do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than themselves.”**

And here comes the kicker: **“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.”**

If you are like me, this is the point where you go, “uh, oh.” But we need not say, “uh, oh.” What we should be saying is “Cool!!! Alright!!! This is what I want. This is how I want to live my life!!! This is what it’s all about.”

And it is.

It just doesn't seem that way when we think someone else is wrong and we are right...when the anger of a bruised ego is burning bright...when we are asking people to take sides...when we are in a fight—when it's all about me.

And when it's all about me, verse 6 of our Scripture is very applicable, is it not? As it says, Jesus Christ, **“Who, being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped.”**

To every one of us who have been caught up in envy and selfish ambition—equality with God seems like a great prize—something that could be gloried in and exploited for our own purposes. A...“I'll show her!!!”...Or “I'll show him!!!”...Or “I'll show them!!!”

But you see, when we are caught up in this kind of attitude, we are missing the meaning of power. God's power—True POWER is found in complete and utter self-giving. And when I'm fighting for my right to BE RIGHT, I'm not being very self-giving at all am I?

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself.”

Think about it this way: Jesus Christ is God. But God emptied Himself, not in spite of being in the form of God, but because this is what God is like—unlike humans, such as Adam who tried to “grasp” up at equality with God--Christ reached down and was born in the likeness of Adam.

Although, whereas Adam disobeyed God's command, Jesus was obedient, even to the point of death. And, although He didn't deserve it, Jesus shared Adam's fate, worse still, He died by crucifixion, the particularly painful and shameful death of rebels and slaves.

Being in the form of God meant dying the most gruesome of deaths for us—because He loves us—and does **“nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility considers others better than Himself,”**—even you, even me.

He looks after the interests of others. This is the attitude of Christ, as He makes Himself nothing. And He did it, not just on the Cross, He did it His entire life: For the sake of the multitudes, for His befuddled disciples, for the diseased, for outcasts, for women, for children, for Pharisees—for everyone He came in contact with.

This is the attitude of Christ: entirely choosing to pour Himself out, even to the point of crucifixion—not grasping at glory, but living, loving, dying an emptied Self.

And this should be our attitude as well!!!

Is it any wonder that, in the midst of his struggle for justice, Mohandas Gandhi having been so excited by the teachings of Jesus was terribly disappointed when He met those of us who call ourselves Christ’s followers?

“I like your Christ,” Gandhi said, “I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.”

And isn’t this what the world is telling us as they sleep in this morning? Isn’t this what so many of our young people are saying to us as they make the decision to stay away from what they call “organized religion”?

You see, Jesus didn’t gripe and grown...Jesus wasn’t cranky and mean...Jesus didn’t pick sides nor did He pick fights...Jesus didn’t leave some people out and allow others in...Jesus didn’t judge...because Jesus is nothing like us.

When confronted with such a radical message, I like to ask myself: “Eric, what difference would it make if you were to hear these words

directed at you?”...“How can I practice having the attitude of Christ?”...“What part of my own mind-set do I need to let go of in order to be more like Jesus?”...“What would change if I were to focus on my need to change rather than the need for others to change?”

It is of the utmost importance that I remember who I am and who I am called to be, lest pettiness draws me into a preoccupation with myself and I lose my identity, my calling, my mission.

Jesus Christ lived His life not building Himself up, but building up others. You and I, we are invited to have the same perspective as that of Jesus Himself. We are invited to be like Christ Who gave up power and privilege to be in the midst of a suffering world.

There is no commitment more nobler, more life-giving, more freeing than embracing the call to convert to humility, to willingly emptying ourselves for others.

Lord help me to be more like You...Lord, help me to want to be like You. In Your mercy, hear my prayer. Amen!