



## ***“The Mind That Was in Christ”***

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*Philippians 2:1-11*

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*Jesus – the name above all names. At the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.* This is beautiful poetry to convey the Lordship of Christ, words we treasure in prayer and in song. But we can be drawn to the exaltation and miss the journey that leads to it. On Palm Sunday, the day the lectionary assigns this passage every year, we’re especially prone to focus too much on the celebrations that bookend our lesson and skip over the dark valley between. That’s particularly true if we confine our worship to Sundays, passing from palm branches to the empty tomb with only a cursory glance at the cross along the way. If that’s the case, we’re not so unlike the crowds that first Palm Sunday, reveling in the majesty of Jesus’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem without fully grasping the nature or the magnitude of his saving action. But Christ’s journey during the week we call Holy symbolizes the arc of his ministry, a journey attested to in our scripture lesson for today.

The last five weeks, we’ve focused on the five practices of faithful discipleship as a way of closing the gap between the people we’re called to be and the people we actually are. The premise is that by making the five practices – *worship, grow, serve, give, and invite* – regular habits, they will shape us into more faithful disciples and become part of our core identity. Now, we might look at these five practices and think that they are the key to Christian living; that would be understandable, given the formulaic way we present them. But the five practices are only *part* of the story. We don’t simply follow the practices, form the habits, and “poof!” we’re like Jesus. We want to be a highly effective church, committed to Christ and living the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. But Christian discipleship can’t be reduced to a simple formula. The five practices are essential, but they require something more, something deeper, something that touches the very core of our being.

The Greek word is *kenōsis*, which means “an emptying” or “depletion.” It is a humbling, a casting off of privilege, status, and recognition, exactly the kind of thing we try to avoid in our society:

Christ, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited,  
but emptied himself (*ekenōsen*),  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.  
And being found in human form,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross.

Christ’s journey was a journey *down* before it was a journey *up*. He willingly surrendered his divine privilege and poured himself out to heal the brokenness of the world from the inside. In him, we are reminded that the world’s deepest needs are not solved through strength and conquest, but with humility and compassion – compassion literally means “to suffer with” others. It is this very pattern of self-emptying that is our model for faithful living, according to Paul. As Rev. Kendrick beautifully said it in the prayer he shared last Sunday, “though we are not called to die like Christ, we *are* called to live like him.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen M. Fearing. <http://www.stephenmfearing.com/liturgy//prayers-of-the-people-lent-5c-march-13th-2016>

Paul appeals to the Philippians and to us not to think of *kenōsis* as a personal quest, but as a posture lived out in community:

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, (*and by means of suggestion, Paul is saying those things do exist in their life together; therefore:*) make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 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.

Throughout our *Habitology* series, we've explored five practices of faithful discipleship – in our life together as a church and on your own. To recap, those five practices are:

- *Worship* – every week with as few exceptions as possible, and pray five times a day
- *Grow* – as part of a small group and by reading five verses of scripture a day
- *Serve* – in hands-on mission at least twice a year and through five acts of kindness a week
- *Give* – a percentage of your income to God through your church and through five acts of unexpected generosity every month; and
- *Invite* – people to see Christ in the way you live and directly invite five people a year to church

When we first adopted the five practices of faithful discipleship as a guide for our lives at Church of the Saviour four years ago, we drew them from the teachings of the church and a foundational grounding in scripture. Each is evidenced in the practice of God's people as attested throughout the Bible: from *worship* at Abraham's and Sarah's first stone altar, *growing* through the Deuteronomic commandments to bind God's laws on our foreheads and our hearts, *servicing* in the practice of caring for the vulnerable, *giving* by bringing the first harvest to the temple, and the *invitation* of the Great Commission. But we also find the five practices modeled by Christ himself. Jesus went to the synagogue to worship and often retreated by himself to pray. He studied and quoted the scriptures and interpreted them within his small group of disciples and for the crowds that followed him. He healed the sick and injured in body and spirit. He praised the widow who offered her pennies and blessed the giving of food that fed thousands. And he invited everyone to experience the way to God and the coming kingdom. As his mission neared its completion, the five continued to be his practice, even to the end.

*Worship:* On the very night before his death, Jesus celebrated the Passover with his disciples. He prayed with them in the Upper Room and again in the garden. *Grow:* Jesus quoted the 22<sup>nd</sup> Psalm from the cross, a psalm that testifies to God's goodness even in the midst of despair. And as the life drained from him, he established a bond of sacred responsibility between his mother Mary and his disciple John. *Serve:* His prayer in the garden was that, if it were possible, the cup would pass from him; but in the very next breath, he submitted his will to God's. *Give:* When the soldiers came to arrest him, Jesus gave himself willingly as the disciples fled in fear. He poured out his life with arms opened wide. *Invite:* Even in his agony, Jesus assured the thief who sought redemption, "Today, you will be with me in paradise."

We follow the practices we see modeled by Jesus and his followers throughout history. But discipleship is more than following a formula. The truth is, you can follow all five practices and still not be a disciple. It takes more than habits, no matter how good those habits are. We ultimately become disciples of Jesus Christ by matching our *hearts* with our *practice*. In Paul's words, we become true followers of Jesus by having "the mind that was in Christ."

Friends, there is no journey *up* without the journey *in*. If we want to draw closer to the kingdom of God, we must adopt the way of Christ. Dr. King knew that. Mother Teresa knew that. Bishop Oscar Romero knew that. It is not desire or strategy or even motive that turns the tide, but the faith and the faithfulness that powers and sustains it.

We've set some fairly ambitious goals for ourselves as a congregation. We've declared it a fundamental value to remove every barrier to experiencing the Gospel of Jesus Christ by being a fully inclusive church. We've committed ourselves to not only resist racism, but to be intentionally *anti-racist* in our policies, practices, and witness. We strive

to lead the way in mission, both here on Cleveland's East Side and around the world. We pray for and work for the welfare of our community, *bringing new life to greater heights* through our caring connections, outreach, and sharing of the Gospel. We've only scratched the surface of what God imagines for us, and we believe that God has much more in store as we grow in discipleship and in faithfulness to our calling. But none of it happens if we make it about us. *Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus...who didn't exploit privilege, but emptied himself...*

Nothing we do is an end unto itself. Everything points back to Christ and living the way he modeled for us. Good works are wonderful. But the impact of any initiative is limited if the goal is only the initiative itself or the one who enacts it. But if the goal is *transformation* – transformed lives, transformed communities, transformed faith – then the limit is determined by how far God can take us, which is always further than we think is possible.

The journey is not easy. It is costly, in fact. We cannot go from Hilltop Hosannas to Easter Alleluias without the journey down and the way of the cross. Being faithful to the way of Christ may cost us treasured traditions, income, members, or popularity. Those who seek to save their life will lose it, but those who lose their life for Christ and the sake of the Gospel will find it. *There is no journey up without the journey in.* But...if we're willing to set aside ourselves – our notions of success, our grasp on the past or vision for the future, our sense of identity and privileged status – God can take us where we never knew we could go.

You want to be anti-racist? *Have the mind that was in Christ.*

You want to feed the hungry? *Have the mind that was in Christ.*

You want to stop mass shootings? *Have the mind that was in Christ.*

You want to end the immigration crisis? *Have the mind that was in Christ.*

You want to heal the divisions in our world? *Have the mind that was in Christ.*

You want a more hopeful future, a world where kindness is currency, where violence doesn't dominate our streets and our entertainment, where respect for God and God's creation are commonplace, where justice and mercy meet, where grace isn't just an idealized notion but a way of life? *Have the mind that was in Christ.* Set aside privilege. Let go of status. Be humble. Be faithful.

On this day, as we shout our Hosannas and wave our palm branches, our thoughts also turn to the week ahead, to Christ's intimate final moments with his disciples, his institution of the sacrament we know as Communion, his prayer in the garden, his arrest and trial, his physical abuse and crucifixion. His is a journey that will take him from the heights of praise and popularity to the depths of suffering. It's a story we revisit every year and often in-between, because it is also the story of our redemption. This week forces us to set aside notions of triumphalism and status, to come face-to-face with this reality: Christ died to save sinners – *only sinners.*

So, as we give thanks for all that Christ has done for us, we commit ourselves to a life of faithful discipleship. We do that, at least in part, by following the five practices. *Worship, grow, serve, give, and invite* – not for the sake of our church or ourselves, but for the sake of Christ and his mission. But let's resolve to do so with the mind of Christ, who emptied himself and entered our life so we could have life. The goal is not to be better people or to be a healthier church or to accomplish more good; those are side benefits. As those who have been redeemed by Christ's obedience even to the point of death on a cross, we are called to share that redemptive love with the world.

Let's pray: *Jesus, we praise you and confess our faith in you. Thank you for not being content to observe our brokenness from a distance, but relinquishing your privilege and entering our life to seek us and save us. You never stopped giving yourself, even when we betrayed you, denied you, and ran away from you. Your love kept giving, even to the last, even beyond the grave, even now. Help us to learn from you and to adopt your humility and compassion, so we can share your amazing love with the world you gave yourself to save. In your matchless name, we pray. Amen.*