

On Having the Mind of Christ
Based on Philippians 2:5-11
Palm Sunday 2018
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Ticker tape parades are not your garden variety parade. Do you know what I mean? There's always a parade for Independence Day. A lot of cities will have a parade on St. Patrick's Day. Columbus has one of the largest Pride Day parades in the country. You can count on those parades year after year.

But a ticker tape parade is different. Those only happen after special events, usually sports victories. Philadelphia had a big ticker tape parade when the Eagles won the Super Bowl. And one of these days, when the beloved Cleveland Browns get their Super Bowl victory, it will be the ticker tape parade to beat all ticker tape parades. These parades are all about celebrating the accomplishment of our fellow citizens. Whether it be a football team, the first astronauts to land on the moon, or some other great accomplishment, part of celebrating the achievement is to throw a parade.

And so it was, on the Sabbath leading up to Passover that one year, that Jesus got his ticker tape parade. News about his amazing achievements had spread across the land. He taught with authority. He healed people of blindness. He cast out demons. He changed water into wine. He even brought people back to life with a simple word of command. No one could do what Jesus did. He was a VIP but also a man of the people. The religious authorities were suspicious of him. And Jesus was quick to call them out on their hypocrisy. Jesus represented the average person. He wasn't one of the elite. He was one of us. And what power he wielded. Many thought he might even be the messiah. And so here he was, riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, while people along the parade route lay cloaks down on the ground for Jesus to walk on so that dust wouldn't be kicked up to soil his clothes. And people waved their palm branches with shouts of victory, crying out, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

It was quite a scene, this first century ticker tape parade that Jesus received in his honor.

How quickly things changed. In a matter of days Jesus was betrayed by Judas and abandoned by his disciples. The crowd turned on him in blinding speed. He faced his accusers, was slapped and spit on, mocked, flogged, nailed onto a cross and displayed for everyone to see, a public execution of the most cruel form. A lynching would have been more humane. In just a matter of days, the great hero, the hope of the people, died, not as a common criminal, but as an enemy of the state, the worst of the worst. It is difficult if not impossible to wrap our heads around how fast Jesus fell from grace.

But, after all, this is what Jesus had come to do. He knew his purpose. He knew how he would have to go about destroying the power of sin and death in order to save the world and initiate new creation. His crucifixion was all part of the plan.

And this is part of what makes Jesus so amazing. He did not save the world like a super hero. He didn't take out the bad guys with his physical strength, his super powers, or anything like that. He didn't call up a special team like the Avengers or the Justice League to save humanity from eternal destruction. It wasn't like any super hero story that had ever been told before or, to my knowledge, has ever been told since.

No, Jesus saved the world in the most unexpected and upside down of ways, a way that no one would have ever expected. Jesus defeated the powers of sin and death by letting those powers win. He surrendered to the powers that be. He did not resist being accused, beaten and crucified despite the fact that he was an innocent man. Jesus won by first losing. And he did this all along knowing that he was setting up a trap that would destroy forever the power of sin and death, a victory that we will celebrate with abandon next Sunday. It was a stealth operation that took everyone by surprise. The savior conquered by freely laying aside his status, his privilege and prerogative as the son of God, and embraced the role of a disempowered nobody of a slave. Rather than calling on a legion of angels to come down and deliver him or take out the powers that be, Jesus allowed himself to be led like an innocent lamb to the

slaughter. No one divests themselves of their status like Jesus did. No one who had such power and glory freely and willingly set that aside to be treated so disgracefully like Jesus was, without saying a mumbling word.

Paul captures this upside down way of Jesus' saving work by quoting this contemporary hymn of his day which captured the scandalous trickery of Jesus. He who was in the form of God did not regard his equality with God as something to be exploited. He wasn't going to use the "son of God" card to get out of having to serve others. No, Jesus emptied himself of all that status, of all that privilege and prerogative, taking the form of a slave. How scandalous. Jesus humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, and not just any death. The son of God, equal in power and glory to God, was killed on a cross, a method reserved for the worst of criminals. It is incomprehensible that a person who possessed such status and glory would stoop to such degradation. But what did God do? God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, even Caesar, and that every tongue should confess, even Caesar, that Jesus Christ is Lord, not Caesar. Friends, that old Christian hymn is fighting words. That hymn is a barely veiled subversive attack on the powers that be. I am not being hyperbolic when I tell you that if people in those days were caught singing that song in public, they could have been charged with sedition and potentially could have found themselves nailed to a cross as well. We do not fully appreciate how politically charged the Christian movement was in those days. Let's not forget that while Paul was writing this letter to the Philippian church, quoting this hymn, he was sitting in a prison cell chained to the floor. They all knew how what Jesus had done had completely subverted the order of the world, giving the lie to the powers that be, that the powers of sin and death that the powers of this world yield has been broken by Jesus, who never stopped being equal with God even as he willingly emptied himself of all that status and allowed himself to be disposed of as an enemy of the state.

OK, let me stop for a minute. Maybe some of you are wondering, "Pastor Kevin, what's with the ear beating about status, sedition, Caesar

bending the knee, enemy of the state talk? That's sounding pretty political there." Let me say this. The suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus has many meanings and a multiplicity of implications. The political impact of what Jesus did can't be overlooked. Let's not forget that Jesus was crucified because the case was made that Jesus was seeking to lead a rebellion that sought to overthrow the power of Rome. But, of course, what Jesus did is about much more than politics. What Jesus was up to was making possible everlasting life.

That said, Paul had a reason for quoting this hymn about Jesus. He states the point he is making a few verses earlier, where he writes, "Be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord...Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves." Paul was likely having to make this point because he had heard that the believers in Philippi were getting into some status seeking and protecting. He doesn't give any examples. But what might have been going on? I wonder if there were some people in the church who had ambitions of being in positions of authority where they could call the shots. Maybe there were some believers who were attempting to undermine others so that they could then move in and take control. Maybe there were some who were team players in public but in private were plotting ways to undermine the leadership and then take over. Or worse, plotting to start their own group. Maybe there were some believers who felt like they were being overlooked or not given proper respect. They were being asked to clean toilets when they thought they should be running meetings and telling others what to do. Or maybe there were some leaders who thought certain work was beneath them. Maybe there was a whiff of arrogance drifting into the house of believers there in Philippi.

Paul writes in verse 4, "Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others." He is saying to them, "Hey, this isn't about what you want, your preferences, your comforts, what works out for you. The kind of Christian community we need is one where everyone is looking out for everyone else, sacrificing your own comforts and preferences and instead tending to the needs of others." In this way, Paul writes, they will have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus. I

mean if there is anyone who could sit in the leader's chair and tell everyone else what to do, it's Jesus. But that's not what he did.

Just think about it. Here is Jesus, the very son of God, equal to God in status. He didn't need to prove himself to anyone. He had more status than Caesar himself. He knew who really had all the power. Jesus knew who he was even as he humbly took on the role of a servant and was obedient even to the point of death on the cross. Not once did he think he was a worthless slave. Not once did he think somehow he deserved to be treated like he was. If everyone wanted to throw a parade for him, fine. If the crowd wants to scream out "Crucify him," fine. He didn't change what he thought about himself, his value, his status. It didn't matter how anyone treated him. He wasn't there to impress anyone with his skills and talents. He was there to proclaim the good news, heal the sick, cast out demons, teach how to love God and love neighbor, be killed, and then rise from the dead and ascend back into the heavens. He knew what he was about and what his task was. He was not here to make a name for himself.

So this is the thing. What Jesus did, taking on the form of a slave, being obedient even to the point of death on the cross, didn't take anything away from who he is, the son of God and equal to God in status and power. He was still that even as he lived his life of sacrificial service to others. Nothing was beneath him. He freely chose to do whatever was needed for the well-being of others. He knew the power and authority he had and he chose to use that power and authority for the well-being of others and not for his own hunger for power and status.

The same can be true for us. We don't have to be chasing after status, scheming to be the one in charge or making a name for ourselves. Why? Because we know who we are. Who are we? We are beloved children of God, every one of us. Of course we aren't like Jesus. But we are sons and daughters of God. We are, every one of us, extremely precious to God. We are not nobodies, no matter what anyone tells you or how the social pecking order places you or me. Where we fit as far as worldly status takes *nothing* away from who we are...sons and daughters of God. Our identity as children of God cannot be taken from us no matter what anyone says about us, how we are treated or

mistreated, or where we fit in systems of power. Who we are does not depend on where we fit in this world. And you know what? To the extent that we can claim our identity regardless of life circumstances we tap in to a power that is stronger than any other power in this world. The power of claiming your identity as a beloved child of God is no trifling power.

So what would it look like if we had the same mind as that of Christ Jesus? Maybe a way to get at that answer is to consider what motivated Jesus to do what he did, to take the form of a slave and to do whatever was necessary for the well-being of others. What do you think Jesus was motivated by? Surely, Jesus was motivated by love. When you love someone, you are willing to sacrifice your own interests if need be to care for the interests of the one you love. Parents who love their kids sacrifice their own needs for their kids. Kids who love their parents sacrifice their own needs to care for their parents. That's just one example. People who love their country sacrifice their own needs to serve the needs of their country. We know that love is what motivates us to put the needs of the beloved above our own. We are motivated in many different ways. We are motivated to make money. We are motivated to feed our need to be needed. We are motivated to be in control. But Paul would urge us to be motivated by love just like Jesus was. Imagine what our family, our church, our community, our nation, our world, would be like if we all claimed our true identity and were motivated by love to put other's needs above our own? It would turn this world upside down. In fact, the world would be completely new. For once, God's will would be done on earth as it is in heaven. What a vision to live in to.

As we begin the journey through Holy Week, and we hear again the story of Christ's passion, my prayer, for myself and for all of you, is that we will probe deeper into the mind of Christ, be moved deeply by the actions Jesus allowed to happen to himself so that the power of sin and death could be broken for all of us. May we be inspired and challenged to have the same mind as Christ Jesus and live a life of sacrificial love as sons and daughters of God.