

## Embodying God's Love

### *Philippians 2: 1-15*

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, 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. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited,  
but emptied himself,  
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.

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.

Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without murmuring and arguing, so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world.

Run an errand. Go to Target or Home Depot or Costco. Notice the mask wearing mandate posted on the glass door. Walk into the store and see that some don't comply with the store policy. What is the reaction your body has? Tight? Recoiled? Do our palms get sweaty? Or our gut begin to knot and turn?

The other day I heard an altercation between a shopper and an employee that went something like this:

“Excuse me sir, can you please wear a mask?”

“I don’t have a mask.”

“Well, can I get you one?”

“No thanks, I’m good.”

“Sir, please let me get you a mask. We are in the midst of a pandemic and would like to keep our shoppers safe.”

“Listen, masks don’t help. It’s my choice, my life, my freedom. I am not giving into fear.”

“Sir, it’s not about being afraid, it’s about being considerate of each other. It’s store policy.”

“Well, I am free to do as I like. Now leave me alone.”

“But sir...”

“I said leave me alone!”

We hear the dialogue too often these days and we wonder what ever happened to St. Paul’s words: “Be of the same mind as Christ. Do not look to your own interest, but to the interest of others.”

In our world during this time, his words pop out at us like a 3-D image: Do not look to your own interest, but to the interest of others. Since when is it normal to be inconsiderate of our neighbor? When did not caring about each other’s well-being or feelings become a thing?

I mean, imagine for a moment if we all leaned into St. Paul’s basic instructions. Imagine if politicians practiced letting go of their own interests and looked to the interests of the poor. Imagine if we all voted with each other’s community’s interests in mind—the Black community, the immigrant community, the Latinx community, the LGBTQ community—we might wonder if there would be such a thing as segregated neighborhoods or school-to-prison pipelines or citizens without basic health care? To live in a society where others are centered feels safe to me in my body. It feels warm. It feels like the embodiment of God’s kin-dom.

Of course, we know where St. Paul got the idea from. He is all about imitating Jesus. When we look at who Jesus was—who his is—he is weak by corporate standards. Rather than climbing the ladder of influence and power, he descends it to be human like us. To be with us. He is as vulnerable as a we are; susceptible to broken bones and scabbed knees and runny noses. More, he does not come as an authoritarian figure who demands to be served, but as a servant himself who looks to the interests of the ones who the world forgets. And of course, he suffers at the hands of a politicized, weaponized state in cahoots with the religious establishment.

Jesus travels the downward spiral, lower and lower.

From an eternal God to a finite human—lower.

From master king to servant leader—lower.

From suffering death to suffering death on a cross—lower.

The God we meet in Jesus empties his pockets of privilege and power for the sake of others.

Except, here’s our dilemma. We compromise around power and privilege all the time. We see it when we hear about the church backing tough candidates who are quick to shoot back at the opposition. We see it when the faithful play blind to sketchy scandals or excuse morally

bankrupt behaviors. We see it when the church aborts justice in the name of preserving our own self-interests. Both conservatives and progressives do it. During this year's Democratic primaries, when Bernie still had a fighting chance, a swath of progressive corporate CEOs went public saying that if Bernie won the nomination, they were throwing their weight behind Trump. They were willing to abandon their principles and values for the sake of staying privileged and at the top. *When the church adopts this way of protecting its privilege, we also abandon our principles and values, and end up looking nothing like the Body of Christ.* You see, the web we get stuck in is that we live in this world and the way the world bends depends on who wields the influence. And so the church finds herself in a conundrum where we are forced to compromise with power.

But hold on to what St. Paul says to us. Make my joy complete: be of the same mind of Christ. Did you hear it? You have the power of Christ in you. Now don't discard it. Do not try to deny it. It won't do any good. Just own it: you have the power of God's love embodied inside of you and its glow is so expansive that—what does St. Paul say?—you shine like stars in the world.

Even as darkness overshadows and anxiety entraps us; even when it feels like our lights are barely flickering, our sharing in a love which is vulnerable and other-oriented makes us shine. So in the midst of difficult times we empty out our pantries to collect 410 pounds of food for Crisis Control Ministry. In the midst of civic unrest we still work on emptying ourselves of privilege to deconstruct white supremacy. In the midst of our uncertain future we still gather, singing into our iPads and celebrating our gratitude and pouring out our vulnerable laments. And in the process, we shine. Desmond Tutu once said that we are all a bunch of human light bulbs who simply need to be plugged into the source—into the mind of Christ. The one who empties himself of power and self-advantage is embodied in you and me and all of us who are plugged into the love and generosity and gentleness and hope and justice and self-giving vulnerability of what it means to be fully human. Because, the truth is, we can't be fully human without one another.

So in a season when selfishness is endorsed and emboldened,  
In a moment when it seems as if everything that is wrong with the world is winning,  
keep clinging to the truth that you are a beloved child of the Creator,  
a daughter of the Divine,  
a son of the Sacred,  
a human being of the Holy,  
a people whose power is in love  
and whose strength is in vulnerability.  
Which means that no matter what anyone says or does,  
the light of God within us cannot be extinguished.

Make my joy complete: do not look to your own interest, but to the interest of others.  
And then for a moment, stop and notice how we shine—just like stars in the world.  
Amen.