

Written Copy: Philippians 2:4-11 “When You Behold Jesus Christ”

Palm Sunday/Sunday of the Passion

Sunday, April 2nd, 2023

Text: Philippians 2:4-11

⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The text's intent

Lift up the mindset and example of Christ who set aside His divine right and glory as God the Son to become a human being, not to be worshiped or served, but so that He Himself could obediently serve as our Lamb of Sacrifice. He became man so that He might suffer and die the most horrible way, by crucifixion, and through that be the atoning sacrifice for all mankind's sins. Because of His complete and willing obedience to the Father's plan of salvation He was exalted from the grave in the resurrection and has ascended to rule over all things, exalted over anyone or anything else. And on the Last Day He will be confessed by believers and unbelievers alike to be Jesus Christ, Lord of all. As His Church we are called to live out our lives of faith exemplifying the same mindset of sacrificial obedience and unselfish love to Him by putting the needs of our neighbors before our own. We can do this through the special fellowship and participation we have in the Holy Spirit. Through Him we share personal encouragement, comfort, unselfish and sacrificial love, deep seated affection and compassion with one another as we sacrifice our time, talents, and treasures in the interest of others, as Jesus selflessly did for us.

Focus Statement:

Jesus was God the Son who chose to become human not to demand worship or to be served as He was due, but instead so that He could serve all mankind as the Lamb of sacrifice. He willingly gave Himself over to the worst kind of suffering and death: crucifixion, so that He could be the atoning sacrifice for all. And because of His perfect obedient participation in the Father's plan of salvation He was resurrected and exalted to rule over all things of creation. On the Last Day all will know that He is indeed the Jesus Christ, Lord of all. And so we as His Church might live in this truth He gives us that special fellowship and participation with Him and one another through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

We can look at our call to service in the Church: our call to be stewards from the point of view of the world that says, “me first.” We can criticize the offerings of others as the disciples did, and even limit our giving with the same kind of selfish motives as Judas. We can lose sight of the depth of sacrifice that Jesus gave.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Live in that fellowship with one another through the Holy Spirit putting the needs of others as more important than ourselves and using the blessings we've been given to point to Jesus sacrifice as the answer for all people.

Subject Sentence: Beholding Jesus love we live for others

Introduction: Offering Statements Not Shared w/Others

Most of us like our offering statements kept between ourselves and the Lord. Now, in case you're wondering or feeling a bit nervous, I agree wholeheartedly with that. I have heard stories about the past practices of Churches that would post the offering statements for each parishioner on the wall of the fellowship hall for all to see. And never once have I heard that it was a positive thing, especially to encourage individuals to give more. I firmly believe that what you decide to give is between you and Jesus. That is one of the reasons we don't pass the offering plate. When the plate is coming down the row, and I see my brother and sister in Christ put a \$100 bill in the plate, I feel compelled to give the same. But when I do that, am I doing it with a thankful loving heart for Jesus, or a heart filled with reluctance? And what if you are a person who gives online, or only gives once a month, when the plate comes down would it make you feel guilty to not be putting anything in it like everyone else? And what if you're a visitor? Do we want to give the impression that we invite people just to get their money? What you give should be an act of love between you and Jesus.

Gospel Lesson

So imagine how it felt to be the woman in our Gospel Lesson. Matthew doesn't give us her name, most likely because he, inspired and directed by the Holy Spirit, wants us to focus on the act and not the actor. But the Apostle John in His Gospel helps us out by identifying her as Mary, sister of Lazarus, who had just been raised from the dead prior to this happening. The setting for this story takes place just after that miracle, and right before Jesus Palm Sunday processional entrance.

What is Mary doing? She is giving a beautiful love offering to Jesus by pouring out this oil upon His head. We don't know Mary's financial situation, but whatever it was this was more than just a token offering, more than just a way to show off. This was a sacrifice of quite a bit of money. Mary gives it not because she has to. Jesus has come to eat not at her house but at the house of a man Matthew calls Simon the Leper. It is safe to assume that Simon is at this point probably no longer a leper but has been healed by the hand of Jesus. It was customary at that time to recognize an important guest by washing their feet and/or pouring oil on their head. And it would be the duty of the host to make sure this happened. It's Simon's house, but it's Mary that's doing the anointing. And she's not using just any oil, but the most expensive kind. She's doing this not because she has to, but because she has a heart filled with love for this man who raised her brother from the dead, and has shown Himself to be what He claimed to be, "the resurrection and the life".

That's why the disciples' response to her is so odious. She's giving from her heart, and they are sharply criticizing her for it. Now in truth, most of them could have pious motives in mind. They could and should have genuine concern for the poor, especially at this time of year. It's Passover, when lambs had to be procured, along with all the other ingredients for the Passover Seder meals. And it wasn't just one meal, but a seven-day long festival. But we also know that one of those disciples had a motive that was far from being pious. Judas was the keeper of the money bag as John's Gospel tells us. He wanted the money Mary spent on that ointment in the money bag for himself, so that his sticky fingers could grab some of it, and maybe more than just some. Neither Judas, nor the other 11 disciples for that matter, understood Mary's heart motivation for giving this offering. They are not beholding Jesus the way that Mary is.

Jesus points that out when He chastises them for their angry criticism of her. **Matthew 26:10-12** ^{10b} **"Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. ¹¹ For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. ¹² In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial.** Jesus welcomes Mary's selfless sacrificial offering as a beautiful thing. And even more so wholeheartedly approves of it as God pleasing. Why? Certainly not because it shortchanges the poor. Jesus loves and cares about them. But because there is something more important at this very moment. Mary's sacrificial act of love points forward to the real reason Jesus has come to Jerusalem. It reveals who He really is. It reveals who this Messiah that rides into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday the following day. He is the true King of the Jews, the promised Messiah from the line of David. It reveals He comes not to rule from a throne, but to be the King who becomes the Lamb of Sacrifice for all men. Mary's offering points forward to what will happen on Good Friday, it points forward to is His burial. The fact that she has been moved by the Spirit to prepare Him for this five days in advance speaks to the certainty that it will happen.

Of all people, the disciples should've beheld Jesus in a different light then they did at that moment. Jesus has been telling them all along what will happen when they get to Jerusalem: He would be arrested and suffer at the hands of both the Jewish rulers and the Romans and be crucified. But they don't see it. They don't understand that this Passover celebration will be different from the previous years. They don't yet understand or believe that He has come to be the Lamb of Sacrifice, and that His suffering, death, and the resurrection are all part of the Heavenly Father's will and plan. Because they don't behold Him as Mary does, they cannot understand the depth of love and thankfulness in her sacrificial offering.

Epistle Lesson

Philippians 2:6-8 ⁶ (Jesus), who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Paul in our Epistle Lesson gives us a great summation of how we should behold Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection, and what it should mean for us. He is God the Son, divine member of the Trinity, who has come down to live among and join with His creation. As such He deserves more than just oil poured on His head. He deserves the deepest and most sincere worship and praise from His creatures who owe their very existence to Him as the author and creator of life. That's what He deserves, but that's not what He comes to seek. He is God the Son who set aside the glory, honor, majesty, and power that always belonged to Him. He came and took on not only a human nature but placed Himself under obedience to all the rules and laws the Father commands of us. And He kept them all perfectly.

He did not completely give up His divine power over nature and death that belongs to Him as God the Son. He just didn't always make use of it. And when He did, it wasn't for His own glory or good, but always to further the plan and will of God the Father. He used it to reveal Himself as the Son of God who came to die for His Creation. As true God He could not die. But in willingly and obediently joining Himself to the human nature, He was the God could and did experience what He never should have: death. And not just any death, but the most horrific kind of death, crucifixion. He willingly did this not begrudgingly, but out of obedient love to the Father. He did it for you and me, with that supernatural sacrificial and unconditional love that can only come from God Himself, filling His heart, centered on you.

Philippians 2:9-11 ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

As a result of His extraordinary obedience to the Father's plan, He was raised up from the grave, His body glorified to live forever. And not only that, but He was also exalted to the right hand of the Father and given the ruling position over all creation. This man Jesus is King of King and Lord of Lords as the risen, ascended, glorified, and eternal God, who rules over all things for your eternal good and mine.

And so that you can begin to understand, and even more so trust by faith that this Jesus, whom you have never seen, truly is the exalted Son of God who became your Lamb of Sacrifice, He gives to you His Spirit, who makes all that Jesus did in His suffering, death, and resurrection really and truly **"for you"**.

Beholding Jesus as Motivation for Christian Living/Giving

While Paul's telling us all this is a good set of verses for Confirmation Class, the Holy Spirit has a greater purpose. He wants you to behold who your Savior is so that you and I might contemplate how great a sacrifice His suffering and death is, and how extraordinary is the love that moved Him to be that Lamb of Sacrifice. He came to you in baptism and continues to come to you through the means of grace, to pour out that same love which moved Jesus to give His life for you. That love, given and strengthened by the Holy Spirit, is the power we need to live our lives as His Church, and do the works of love He calls us to do.

Paul tells us to **(Philippians 2:5) Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus**. We are to live and serve with intentions, goals, and desires that we are not born with. The intentions of our sinful hearts are always opposed to Jesus' intentions. His Spirit must create new Christ-like ones in us. We must be born again by the water and the Word, when we are given new hearts and new minds Through your baptism you were united intimately with the Holy Spirit who came to dwell in you and with you. And through His presence you and I are intimately united together as His Church. We unite around and operate with that sacrificial unconditional love of Christ. That is the power and basis of the fellowship we have together as God's people, and it's through the Holy Spirit that we share it.

What should such a life of fellowship look like? **Philippians 2:3-4** ³ **Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.** ⁴ **Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.** It is serving with a heart and mind that is other centered. It's serving with a heart and mind that beholds all that I've been given is a gracious gift from Jesus who gave His all to save me and make me a child of the Heavenly Father. It's serving with a heart and mind that cares as much about the well-being of others as I do my own. It's a heart and mind that, through this fellowship with the Spirit, moves me to behold the need around me, and then do something about it with what the Lord has given into my hands for that very purpose. I do this not to lift myself up in the eyes of others, but to lift up my Lord and Savior and His Gospel Message so that all might be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.

The world doesn't have that mind and heart and can't understand how on earth we could see any advantage in putting the needs of others before our own. The world is as clueless as the disciples were with Mary's gift. You and I don't naturally have that kind of mind and that heart. Jesus understands that. Jesus came to pay the price to give us that new mind and heart. And His Spirit is at work in you and me right now to motivate and feed that new mind and heart so that we can serve Him better. He does that as we behold Jesus Christ, true God who died for you and for me.

There's a story told by a man who drove taxi in a big city. He was working the late evening shift on a Saturday night. It was past 2:00 AM, which was his quitting time, when he received the call that there was a fare in a quiet part of town. He thought about calling back and telling dispatch that he was done for the night, but something moved him to take the call anyway. He expected to find someone who had one too many drinks at a house party and needed a ride home, or perhaps a lover who had gotten into a quarrel with their significant other. When he arrived at the address, he found a building that was dark except for one light on coming from the window of a ground-floor apartment. He pulled up at the curb and honked the horn. But no one came out.

He thought seriously about just driving off. But instead, he found himself getting out of the car and walking up to the door. He knocked and heard the voice of an elderly lady answer from the other side, saying "Just a minute." When the door opened he beheld a small woman in her 80's, wearing a print dress and pillbox hat with a veil pinned on it. The woman looked as if she had walked right out of a 1940's movie.

The apartment behind her looked as if it hadn't been lived in for years. The furniture was all covered with plastic. There were no pictures on the walls, nothing displayed on the shelves or bookcases or tables. In the corner were several cardboard boxes that appeared to be filled with what used to be displayed on those shelves and walls.

She had only one bag, which he carried out to the taxi with one hand as he helped her walk out with the other. All the while he was still dreading taking this call. What is she doing calling for a taxi this time of night? He was afraid she would turn out to be senile and not have any clue where she was supposed to go.

After she had climbed in he asked her, "Where to?" She gave him the address of a nursing home across town. The quickest way to get there would've been the freeway, but she asked him, "Would you mind taking me through downtown instead? I know it's not the quickest way. But to be honest, I'm not in a big hurry. I'm on my way to hospice care. The doctor says I don't have much longer to live. The taxi driver started the car, then reached over and turned the meter off.

For the next three hours he drove her through the city following her directions. She took him on a tour of her past life. They visited her childhood home, the first house she and her husband had owned after getting married. They drove past the building that had once been the offices of an insurance company where she had worked as an agent. They drove past a warehouse that she said used to be a ballroom where she had first danced with her husband. Finally on the outskirts of town they pulled up in front of the graveyard where she said her husband of 55 years was buried. They sat there in silence for a while, until the lady said it was time for her to get to the nursing home.

When they pulled up two orderlies met them right away as if they'd been waiting for them. As she got out of the car and sat in the wheelchair that they had brought out to her, she got out her purse and asked what she owed him. He told her there was no charge. He refused to accept the money she kept trying to offer him. Instead, he told her, "I should be paying you for sharing your life story with me. I couldn't imagine spending my time this evening in a better way. This time with you has moved me deeply in my heart."

Then he did something he had never ever done before with a fare. He took her hand and asked, "Will you pray with me?" Tears began to form in her eyes as she nodded her head yes. He prayed, "Thank you my Heavenly Father, for moving me to take this fare. Thank you for this evening I got to spend with this remarkable woman and for all the memories she shared. I pray that through the faith in your son, Jesus Christ, that your arms would be there to welcome her home." She said "Amen. I believe He will be."

As the orderly pushed her chair into the nursing home, he sat and watched until the door had closed. It was then the tears he'd been holding back burst forth. When he got back to the taxicab garage there were lots of questions as to where he had been all night, and why there was no fare money to show for it. He didn't say a lot, only that they could take the gas out of his check. He knew they wouldn't understand what this evening had meant to him, and how thankful and grateful he was to have done what he did, and that it was worth every penny and every minute that it cost him.

Conclusion

That cab driver knew what is meant to behold Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. He had experienced firsthand the love that the Spirit poured into his life from the cross. It made him look for other ways he could serve His Lord and Savior in similar unselfish and sacrificial ways. That's how beholding and experiencing the unselfish love of Christ can change a life. The Holy Spirit is at work in you this day to bring to bear and strengthen that unselfish sacrificial love of Christ in your heart. As you behold who Jesus really is, and how great is His suffering, death, and resurrection for you, how might it move you to love and serve others? Amen.