

Philippians 2:1-11 (NRSV)

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, ²make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

⁶who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,

⁷but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,

⁸he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

⁹Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,

¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

*Having the same mind that was in Christ Jesus won't happen by accident or magic.
We must choose and strive to be evermore Christlike. Will we?*

This series has gotten me thinking about deals, specifically my deals with God. There were the deals I tried to make as a boy: *Dear God, if you'll just give me "fill-in-the-blank" just this one time I promise to never ask again and I promise that I'll pay attention in church.* I'm pretty sure that most of us tried such deals when we were kids and I sometimes wonder of there aren't more sophisticated versions that we try as adults. I'm pretty sure that we can't negotiate with God, but then I also wonder what to make of biblical stories like that of Abraham bargaining with God to save the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 1:16-33).

Having spent most of my adult life in the business world, I had a lot of experience making deals of all kinds. In fact, negotiating and trading ends up being the standard way to operate. Thus, it can be easy to see even our salvation as being a deal. Perhaps not as crass as the deal I tried to make when I was ten, but still a deal: *Dear God, I promise to believe, to put my faith in you, so that you will put things right between us.* It is difficult to accept that there is no deal to be made, that I'm put right with God solely as a gift from God. I'm quite sure that I'm not the only person who has trouble accepting that my salvation is only by grace¹ and grace alone.

Salvation by grace alone has always been one of the rallying cries of Protestantism, so much so that we tend to draw a very bright line between what we refer to as "salvation" (being made right with God) and "sanctification" (the process of growing in holiness). But often, I think the line is much clearer in our minds than it is in Scripture. We can get so focused on "getting our ticket to heaven punched" that we fail to see Scripture's full witness about our salvation, which is both *gift* and *task*. Not "or" but "and." As Roger Olsen writes, "Some

¹I like the old definition for grace: God's unmerited favor. By definition, all our efforts and initiatives are excluded. If there were any sense that we deserved our salvation, it wouldn't be unmerited. It wouldn't be grace. It would be a reward.

Christians have emphasized the gift aspect of personal salvation more than the task side, while others have highlighted the task side more than the gift side. And yet, no major Christian denomination or influential Christian leader or thinker has ever denied that in some senses salvation includes both.”²

The same mind

Today’s Scripture passage focuses not on the gift but on the task. Paul urges the Philippian Christians to be of one mind with each other and to strive to have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus. And what is that mind? Even a cursory glance at verses 6-8 reveals the answer. Jesus set aside his equality with God, his “rights” in our vernacular. He emptied³ and humbled himself. He was obedient even to the point of death on a cross.

This is about as hard a teaching as they come. Wouldn’t it be nice if, after urging us to have the same mind as Jesus, Paul had given us a few rules to follow or some thoughts on

The Humiliation of Christ

Rome ruled the New Testament world and did so with the most rank-and-status-conscious culture ever known. Frankly, life was little more than a relentless quest to gain status and honor. Even wealth was desired only for the status it might bring.

Philippi, in Greece, had a unique history and was the most Roman city outside Italy. When Paul arrived in Philippi, we can be sure that he felt like he had stepped into another world. The Roman obsession with status and honor was every bit as evident in Philippi as it was in Rome.

Yet in today’s passage, Paul calls upon two images to portray the selflessness of Jesus Christ. First, he uses “slave” (v.7) – the most dishonorable *public status* one could have, and then “cross” (v.8) – the most dishonorable *public humiliation* one could suffer.¹

It is surely impossible for us to really grasp the shocking nature of Paul’s claim that Jesus, God himself, had taken on the form of a slave, been crucified, and then exalted so that all creation might bow before him. Indeed, the average Philippian was probably less shocked than simply amused. The Roman world scoffed at the very idea.

The humiliation of Christ turns the world upside. Power is weakness. Honor is humiliation. First is last. Victory is death on a cross. And for whom did Christ turn the world upside-down? For whom was he humiliated? For you and for me. Surely, this ought to stagger us, to drive us to our knees as we throw ourselves before such a God and sing praises to his name.

1. This was driven home to me in an article on Christ’s humiliation in the social world of Philippi by J.H. Hellerman in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, v. 160, n. 639 & 640.

Christian ethics. Instead, in this Christ-hymn we get a big dose of theology.

Humiliation, surrendering our rights and privileges, obedience, death – who wants that? We want to win, achieve, triumph, succeed. We want more rights, more privileges. We’ve earned them! We deserve them. We want it here and now.

This is the sin of the so-called “Health and Wealth gospel.” Prosperity preachers promise full bank accounts and healthy bodies in exchange for belief (and a large donation). Yet, Paul points us in a completely different direction. The Christian path is about obedient faithfulness and we should expect that faithfulness to take us down the way of suffering. Perhaps this is why wealth in the gospels is not about reward but warning.⁴

So, the question to us is whether we will welcome Paul’s challenge to have the mind of Christ, even if it looks like a losing “deal” to some. Certainly, to those in Jerusalem on a Friday two thousand years ago, it looked like Jesus had lost to the chief priests and Pilate.

Will we strive each day to be obedient? Will we seek to learn what God desires from us? Will we rise to the challenge of our own God-given vocation? Will we regard others, all others, as better than ourselves, putting aside selfish ambition and conceit (2:4)? Will we put the interests of others ahead of our own, even if it means we “lose” (2:5)? Will we embrace the humility of obedient faith?

²From Olsen’s excellent book, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity and Diversity*, p. 267. This book focuses on the truth that our faith is grounded on a series of “ands,” not “ors.” We are led to these “ands” when we listen to the complete witness of Scripture, not just the portions that agree with our own theology.

³We get too consumed with trying to tease out the meaning of “form” or “emptying,” wondering whether Paul is talking about Jesus’ surrendering his omniscience or omnipotence. But this is not Paul’s point. As Morna Hooker wrote, “Christ did not cease to be in the ‘form of God’ when he took the form of a slave, anymore than he ceased to be the ‘Son of God’ when he was sent into the world. On the contrary, it is *in his self-emptying and his humiliation that he reveals what God is like.*” Want to know what God is like? Look at the humble, obedient, sacrificing Jesus.

⁴Look back to last week’s study on the story of the rich ruler. It is posted at www.standrewacademy.org

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre

If you keep up with the daily *Heart & Mind* Bible readings, you know we've arrived at the climax of Jesus' vocation in Mark's gospel. On our recent trip to the biblical lands, the St. Andrew group not only had the chance to visit the Garden of Gethsemane, which I wrote about a couple of weeks in this space, but also the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (also called the Church of the Resurrection) in Jerusalem, which was first erected over the site of Jesus' crucifixion and burial by the Roman emperor Constantine. Is it *the* place? Probably, yes.

The site of the church is outside the city walls of Jesus' day and was a disused quarry at the time. 1st century tombs have been found there. Until 66AD, Christians held liturgical celebrations on the site. Even when the city walls were extended outside the site in 43-44AD, it was not built upon until the emperor Hadrian built a large complex there. When Constantine's architects and builders arrived to build Constantine's church, they did their research and undertook the expense of tearing down Hadrian's buildings on the site and constructing a new church. They must have been quite sure they had the right location.

Today, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is shared by six denominations. Many additions and reconstructions over the centuries have left the building an architectural mess. But still, it is built on *the* place. Inside the church, there is a large structure which covers up what some believe is the tomb of Christ. There were not many visitors when we arrived, so we were able to enter the tomb and see a slab large enough for a body. Is it *the* slab? No, that's been lost, but the tomb could be in the right place.

After we left the tomb, we made our way past another slab, revered as the place where Jesus' body was made ready for the tomb after the women took his body off the cross. A short way past that slab is a staircase leading up a level to the rocky outcrop known as Calvary, the place where Jesus' cross stood. Is it *the* rock? (I've learned these are the questions everyone asks.) Probably, yes. As we passed by the rock, we were able to pray for a moment and reach in through a small opening to touch the rock.

Though the church is built on the site of Jesus' crucifixion and burial, visiting it wasn't like visiting the Garden of Gethsemane. At the Garden, it is easy to visualize the night of Jesus' arrest. Though the church is on the right site, it is much harder to get that sense of connection with the place – or at least it was for me. That probably explains the attraction of the Garden Tomb and Gordon's site for Calvary on the northern outskirts of old Jerusalem. Though it seems more appropriate than the garish and often crowded Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Garden Tomb is certainly not *the* place.

READING WITH HEART & MIND, JULY 29 – AUGUST 4

Sunday, Mark 14:1-31 How does the anointing at Bethany ready us for what lies ahead? Why does Judas betray Jesus? What do you think Jesus means by the "body" and "blood?" What is the connection between this Passover meal and the exodus from Egypt?

Monday, Mark 14:32-72 Jesus' emotions are not talked about much in the gospels, making this scene even more dramatic. Why doesn't Jesus simply escape out the back side of the garden, which would be easily done, so that he could carry on his ministry?

Tuesday, Mark 15 What do you think are Pilate's motives here? Why do the chief priests charge Jesus with insurrection when they bring him before Pilate, not blasphemy? What is the significance of the torn curtain in the temple? Where do you think all the disciples have gone?

Wednesday, Mark 16 Why such a brief resurrection account? What do you make of the two endings, neither of which is probably genuine. The longer ending is certainly not original. Might the original ending have been lost? What sort of ending would you write for the gospel?

Thursday, Joel 1:1-12 It is most likely that Joel worked in the 5th century BC. This first section is a lament for the nation, which has suffered terribly in a plague of locusts.

Friday, Joel 1:13 – 2:17 What response to this suffering does Joel call for? Why? What might this have to do with the coming day of the Lord (2:1)? Why does so much seeming terror surround God's arrival? 2:10-11 uses dramatic language to convey that the coming day has cosmic implications.

Saturday, Joel 2:18 – 3:21 What is God's response to the people's suffering and sin? Remember that for the Jews and other ancient people, bad things happened because God was punishing them. Is God's arrival a time of terror or is God's spirit poured out on the people? When Peter rises to preach on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) he quotes from Joel. Why? What is the connection between Pentecost and Joel 2:28-29?

Sermon Notes

Scott Engle's class, *Something More*, meets in Wesley Hall at 9:30 every Sunday.

If you are not a part of a Sunday morning class, we hope that you'll visit our class. It is open to adults of all ages. Whether you are new to St. Andrew or just visiting, the class is a great way to begin getting connected. If you have questions, you are welcome to call Scott at 214-291-8009 or e-mail him at sengle@standrewacademy.org.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. In the verses immediately preceding today's passage from Philippians, Paul says that we are privileged to believe in Christ and we are privileged to suffer for him. Paul binds together our theology and our ethics. On the one hand, we confess that Jesus is Lord and Savior, and with the other hand, we put others before ourselves, living in humility and selflessness. We cannot ignore the demands of the Gospel and still proclaim its truth. Discuss what this holding together of theology and ethics means for our lives as Christians, as we strive to be better disciples. You might make a list of key beliefs and then consider the ethical implications of those beliefs. Or turn it around. Make a list of what we are called to do, and then discuss the theological implications of those practices. Why do we do what we do? Only because Jesus said so? . . . or ought we to look a little deeper.
2. In her commentary on Philippians, Morna Hooker reminds us that "we cannot expect to find ready-made answers to these modern-day questions in the Bible." The Bible is not a magic answer book! Paul cannot give us a rule book for how to conduct ourselves in the office. Instead, we need to go back to first principles, to consider what God is like and to consider what God has done for us. Paul has given us hints. Unity and harmony seem to be key, as are humility and selflessness and sacrifice. What other hints are there? What sort of portrait emerges from these hints? Take one tough subject (your choice!) and consider how these hints might take us in one direction or another. For example, how does "sacrifice" inform our discussion of homosexuality or prayer in schools?
3. Being humble . . . that is a word I can deal with. I have a much harder time with "humiliated"! Being humble just seems so Christian and such a nice thing to be. (I guess I could even take pride in my humbleness!??) You might begin by discussing your own reaction to being "humble" v. being "humiliated." Perhaps the difference is this. Being humble is something I can try to do for myself. Being humiliated is something done to me by others. Jesus was both humble and humiliated. He took the form of a slave upon himself. The humiliation of the cross was inflicted on him by others. Have there ever been times in your own life when you were humiliated for the benefit of others? Were you humiliated willingly? How did it make you feel? Why is it so hard for us?