

Palmarum
Palm Sunday / Passion Sunday
13 April 2025
Philippians 2:5-11

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—Amen

The text for this morning's sermon is the Epistle from St. Paul's letter to the church at Philippi, the second chapter.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit—Amen

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.” And what exactly is the Lord up to when we hear this instruction? It appears that He and His Father are hard at work, trying to out-serve the other.

Our text declares a stark, astonishing truth. Jesus is no ordinary man: He is in the form of God because He's the eternal Son of God, enthroned in the heavens from forever. He's all-powerful, all-knowing, limitless in might, and deserving of all worship and glory. To call Jesus “God” is not to rob the Father of His glory—it's not robbery to say He is equal to the Father, because Jesus is fully God, too.

And what does the fully-God Christ do? He becomes incarnate—He becomes man. But it isn't just a joyride. The Son of God hasn't become a human being to slum it for a while and see what it's like to mingle with the hoi polloi. And He doesn't become flesh as a rich young prince to be worshiped by His creation. He makes Himself of no reputation. He begins as one born in a stable to poor Mary—hardly an auspicious beginning. He is born humbly, because He has become man to be a bondservant, to be a slave, to be one so lowly that His life is forfeit for the sake of those He serves.

This is not just empty talk. You see the Savior-Servant going about His bondservant work in the Holy Gospel. He has ridden into Jerusalem to the shouts of “Hosanna!” Imagine the eternal Son of God reduced to riding a borrowed donkey. But now, He humbles Himself even more. Betrayed by Judas, He allows Himself to be arrested and dragged before the high priest. He silently accepts the false accusations and abuse, and He speaks only to voice the truth that He is the Christ, the Son of God. For this, He is beaten and spat upon, but He does not strike back. He endures the sham trial before the cowardly Pilate and once again is accused of all sorts of sins. And once again, He doesn’t lash out, doesn’t give His accusers the punishment they’ve got coming. No, He remains the Servant—subservient to His Father’s will. And what is His Father’s will? That He be obedient to the point of death—even death on the cross, the lowest form of execution reserved only for the worst of criminals and most disobedient of slaves.

And why is this His Father’s will? Because both the Father and the Son desire to serve you, to save you from your sin. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, do not forget that this humiliation and suffering and death are on account of your sins and transgressions. He is dying your death in your place, in service to you, so that you might be forgiven and have eternal life.

So, the Savior Son of God serves to the point of death on the cross, submitting to His Father’s will for your salvation. And what does the Father do? He serves His Son. God raises Him from the dead and highly exalts Him. He gives His Son the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Why? Why is Jesus so exalted? Why will every knee bow and every tongue confess? Because He is the Servant who by His service and death has saved His people. Because those who believe in Him are servants by His grace, and they will rejoice to serve and worship Him. And because those who insist on rejecting Him will

eventually be brought low; their haughty knees which serve only themselves will be bent as they acknowledge their sin on the last day.

So, the Son serves the Father by becoming the slave of all who is obedient unto death. Then the Father serves the Son by highly exalting Him. And how does the text end? Jesus is exalted to the glory of God the Father! He remains the Servant, because God is by nature a servant. And rather than hoard the glory for Himself, He directs it back toward His Father in heaven.

So often, the Lord is portrayed as a merciless judge, a heavy-handed deity who seeks to run and ruin your life to make Himself happy. That is not your Savior at all. Your Savior has the mind to serve.

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.” This does not mean that you are to regard yourself as the sinless Son of God, nor does it mean that you are to humble yourself to crucifixion. Rather, it means you are to have a mind of service. God created man in His image. He created Adam and Eve to serve one another. He created you to serve, even as He is by nature a servant. It’s sin that has destroyed that image, that prevents us from serving one another as we should.

To “have this mind among yourselves” is to be a humble servant. That is why the two verses immediately before our text read like this: “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” Created by God who delights to serve, you have been created to serve. And you have been recreated through the waters of Holy Baptism—recreated to serve.

That's how marriage works; or how it's supposed to, anyway. When man and woman take those vows, they are promising to serve the other—to put the needs of the others before their own. You know your marriage is on solid ground when your worst fight is, “No, honey, this time we're going to do it your way.” But that's never the worst fight in marriage. There's tension over how to spend the money or how to spend the time. There's the temptation to dump as many chores and responsibilities on the other in order to free up your own time. It's far too easy to say, “I know you'd like this, but I'm planning on that instead.” The greatest threat to marriage is putting your own interests above those of your spouse.

It's the same with parents and kids. Parenting takes a load of serving, and parents are often distracted from the task—sometimes by responsibilities, but often for personal pleasure and leisure. The prevailing attitude these days seems to be, “Don't let your kids get in the way of your life.” It's sad. It's selfish. But how easy it is for any parent to say to a child, “Don't bother me,” for no good reason. And how easy it is for kids to be selfish, too—to bother for no good reason, other than boredom, to complain about the chores, or to say, “I know that Mom and Dad want me to do this, but I want to do that. So either I'm going to do it behind their back, or I'm going to make their lives miserable for saying no.”

And what of your neighbor in need—the one next door who needs assistance, or the friend enduring a difficult time? It's so, so easy to become inward-looking, to reason, “I would help if I could, but I surely have too much to do right now.” It might be true. But given the prosperous, relatively-easy lives we have, it might very well be the deception of your sinful flesh, creating stress in your life to prevent you from bearing the burdens of others.

Whether it's family or friends or work or church, Old Adam will always have you saying, “I want things to work my way. I really don't want to help so much, and I want the credit for the

help that I do. Others should do more and give more so that I can do and give less. God has placed me here to do this, but I'm going to do that instead." By nature, we're rotten servants. We can see the benefits of serving one another, for that is how love is strengthened. Likewise, we can see the danger of selfishness and pride and arrogance, often measured in relationships destroyed. But even though it's only sensible to serve others, and even though it's thoroughly Biblical to serve others—and in fact even though serving is the mind of Christ—we're still absolutely terrible at serving. So, the Law, boiled down to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind" and "Love your neighbor as yourself," accuses each of us. It shows us how terribly sinful we are. It shows us how holy and righteous we're not.

And so, you and I would have only despair, except for the Son of God, the suffering Savior-Servant. You look with wonder and thankfulness at the Lord in His passion, because there, He is suffering in order to serve you, in order to save you.

When Jesus prays in the Garden, He prays for you. He is your High Priest, preparing to offer Himself as the Sacrifice for sin. He doesn't want that cup of suffering; but for you He prays to His Father, "Not My will, but Thy will be done." Even today, exalted by His Father, what does He do? He prays for you, intercedes for you: "Father, these are your redeemed, and I have bought them with My blood. Hear their prayers and save them."

When Jesus stands silently before the High Priest and, later, Pilate, He silently accepts all the accusations and the blame in service to you. The accusations are false, of course. The sins are not His. The sins are yours, but He takes them. He takes the blame and does not defend Himself, because He's taking all of your sins to the cross—to serve you. And so, the Son thus declares, "No, Father, do not judge these people for their sins. Judge Me for them instead."

And that is what the cross is about. In service to you, the Savior suffers far more than physical torment and death. He suffers His Father's judgment for your sins and for the sins of the world. He suffers hell there for you. "Greater love has no man than this, than to lay down His life for His friends," He once told His disciples, and there is no greater love or service than His cross in your place. Do not miss, by the way, that the Father is serving you at the cross, too. For rather than judge you for your sin, He gives His Son in your place. For you.

That is your Savior—the Son of God who makes Himself of no reputation and becomes obedient to death on the cross for you. By His death, you have life. By His grace, you are now set free to serve others—you are set free from sin to serve as God created you to do.

"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus." Even as you serve others now, you'll still sin selfishly every day. Your mind, still tempted and goaded by sin, will not be the mind of Christ. But you have hope, the certainty of salvation. You have the mind of Christ, because Christ joins Himself to you. He speaks His Word of grace, renewing your Baptism and declaring you remain His child. He gives you His body and blood, and so He is with you always. He is with you always to serve. And solely by His service to you, you are sure that you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit—Amen

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus—Amen