

Midweek Lent

March 18, 2020

Philippians 2: 1-16 The Passion Translation (TPT)

Look at how much encouragement you've found in your relationship with the Anointed One! You are filled to overflowing with his comforting love. You have experienced a deepening friendship with the Holy Spirit and have felt his tender affection and mercy. So, I'm asking you, my friends, that you be joined together in perfect unity—with one heart, one passion, and united in one love. Walk together with one harmonious purpose and you will fill my heart with unbounded joy.

Be free from pride-filled opinions, for they will only harm your cherished unity. Don't allow self-promotion to hide in your hearts, but in authentic humility put others first and view others as more important than yourselves. Abandon every display of selfishness. Possess a greater concern for what matters to others instead of your own interests. And consider the example that Jesus, the Anointed One, has set before us. Let his mindset become your motivation.

He existed in the form of God, yet he gave no thought to seizing equality with God as his supreme prize. Instead he emptied himself of his outward glory by reducing himself to the form of a lowly servant. He became human! He humbled himself and became vulnerable, choosing to be revealed as a man and was obedient. He was a perfect example, even in his death—a criminal's death by crucifixion! Because of that obedience, God exalted him and multiplied his greatness! He has now been given the greatest of all names!

The authority of the name of Jesus causes every knee to bow in reverence! Everything and everyone will one day submit to this name—in the heavenly realm, in the earthly realm, and in the demonic realm. And every tongue will proclaim in every language: "Jesus Christ is Lord Yahweh," bringing glory and honor to God, his Father!

My beloved ones, just like you've always listened to everything I've taught you in the past, I'm asking you now to keep following my instructions as though I were right there with you. Now you must continue to make this new life fully manifested as you live in the holy awe of God—which brings you trembling into his presence. God will continually revitalize you, implanting within you the passion to do what pleases him.

Live a cheerful life, without complaining or division among yourselves. For then you will be seen as innocent, faultless, and pure children of God, even though you live in the midst of a brutal and perverse culture. For you will appear among them as shining lights in the universe, offering them the words of eternal life.

I haven't labored among you for nothing, for your lives are the fruit of my ministry and will be my glorious boast at the unveiling of Christ!

This is the word of the Lord.

## What's in A Name?

### Prayer

We all know the importance of a name: Ford, GM, IBM, GE, Coronavirus, Covid-19, Tom, Dick, Jane, Sally, Voldemort (he who must not be named!). Simply dropping the correct name at the right time fills in a lot of blanks. Say GE and you think of tech; GM and Ford and the auto industry pops to mind; Tom, Dick, Jane, and Sally and many of us transported back to our early school days and learning to read; Coronavirus and Covid-19 - isolation and fear come to mind; Voldemort and some of you will scratch your head (unless you are a Gen-Xer. In any case, prepare for the end of the world as we know it.).

Names are extremely important.

“Because of that obedience, God exalted him (Jesus) and multiplied his greatness! He has now been given the greatest of all names! The authority of the name of Jesus causes every knee to bow in reverence!”

Philippians 2:9-10

Paul, in his letter to the church at Philippi has set before the congregation the grand drama of Christ's redemptive work and its meaning for the faith community. He began with an appeal to unity – “with one heart, one passion, and united in one love. Walk together with one harmonious purpose...”. Such unity is accomplished through humility and obedience – mirroring the life of Christ. Appealing to Jesus Paul describes a movement of descent and ascent, a drama that tells us first of Christ's descent from a position of being in the form of God and equal with God, to being in the form of a slave, in the likeness of human beings, in the appearance of a singular human being, obedient even to the point of death by crucifixion. Secondly, having been raised on a cross, Christ is exalted even higher by God, so that all creation will bow down and confess him as Lord.

This drama of descent and ascent is also the story of Christ moving from separation to solidarity, and from difference to likeness. Language like this can be difficult to understand, especially in the current situation of the Coronavirus pandemic. All indications are that we have a long way to go before this virus thing is under control. Word has come that a very limited test of a vaccine has started. We pray for those working to create this vaccine and those willing to be tested upon. We are being advised to avoid social contact as much as possible to the extent that schools, restaurants, pubs have been ordered closed and a recommendation that gatherings of more than 10 people be avoided. No real time-frame has been given other than 4 to 8 weeks. Into this growing crisis the church has followed suit, shuttering doors in order to protect the health of not only the congregation, but also anyone a congregant may encounter. Many congregations are exploring new ways of gathering, exploring things like streaming a

modified service through such systems as Facebook and You Tube. Isolation, not just quarantine, but isolation is a very real possibility and can be fraught with all sorts of dangers. A way to combat this is to encourage you, members of Zion, members of Millwood and the community at large, to be in contact with each other. Call. Offer support. Pray together. Read scripture to each other. Run errands if possible. And remember, it may be helpful to see this as a similar descent. As a people we are humbled, not just to things beyond our control, we are humbled in a positive way to be able to pray for and serve each other.

For this very reason, the story of Christ, which is also our story, moves from separation to solidarity, and from difference to likeness, as Christ moves into the most despairing depths of human experience. In the form of a slave, he mirrors back to us the reality of our own enslavement to sin and death. He comes very near, so near that he "gets under our skin." This is the "kindness" of God, in that God becomes one of our kind, kin to us. This is the incarnation, and it is the source of the life-transforming power that animates Paul's ethical teaching: "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" (2:13).

This movement from separation to solidarity, from difference to likeness, is also ours. Self-quarantine and isolation are difficult, but they are not the last word. We are in this together. Though apart we are not alone. We are joined in a name that is above all names, that of Jesus. Jesus is our hope and our health. We are also joined in our shared experience, in our care and concern for each other.

Our current situation may also reflect for us our Lenten journey. "Lent itself may also feel like a solitary endeavor—but it's not meant to be. The season shows us what it is to be in community, praying, singing and reflecting together; pointing one another to the cross and the path we all take" (ELCA Facebook page). Despite our physical separation we are still community, we are still bound together in the name above all others. As Jesus was raised by God and given the name above others, we to receive life, and strength, to journey through this dark time.

Because of his willingness to be humbled and emptied; because he was willing to be obedient, even to death; God has honored Jesus by raising him high and giving him a name above all other names, a name by which all will bow (the position of obeisance and worship) – LORD.

We all know the importance of a name. As we continue our Lenten journey – separated but together – we do as part of the community of the faithful. We do so as followers of Jesus.

God's peace and healing be with you.

Pastor Inch

