

Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32; Psalm 25:1-8; Phil 2:1-13; Matt 21:23-32 The Rev. Dr. Linda Spiers
Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost – Year A – Sept 27, 2026 Trinity, Wethersfield

Sydney Carter was an English poet, songwriter and folk musician. He's best known for his song "Lord of the Dance"—a song you all know, and for the song "The Crow on the Cradle" which was recorded by Jackson Browne. Here's a poem he wrote entitled "The Good Boy."

The good boy by Sydney Carter

Show me the book of rules
the good boy said
I'll be obedient.

The rules of God
are in this Holy Book
the parson said.

But how can I
be sure that
you are right?

You can't be sure.

*I have created you
in my own image.
Do you think that I*

*Crave for security?
Go out upon
a limb, the way I do;*

*Create a world,
be crucified,
and be obedient*

Only to what you are.

Get thee behind me
Satan, the good boy said
I only want

To see the book of rules
to be obedient.¹

Paul's letter to the Philippians calls that community to be imitators of Christ—to live in such a way that people see Christ in them—to be obedient to all that Christ professed—to *know and live* this book of rules that the good boy only wanted to see.

Just like the Philippians, you and I are called to be imitators of Christ—to live in such a way that others see Christ in us and that we see Christ in others. “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 2:5). I

¹ Sydney Carter, *The Two-Way Clock: Poems* (London: Stainer & Bell, 2000), 21-22.

believe Paul's exhortation was two-fold: do what Christ did and, at the same time, be who you are. We each have our own uniqueness that we bring to doing what Christ did, or trying the best we can to do what Christ did.

Paul was preaching to the church in Philippi—not a new church, rather an established one. It was the first of the churches founded by Paul in Europe. In a sense he was celebrating the gifts that he had seen in the church: “encouragement in Christ,” “consolation from love,” “sharing in the Spirit,” “compassion and sympathy.” (Phil 2:1). The people were already on a journey of solid ground in their ministry. He calls them to go a little further—to stretch by emptying themselves of self. Paul says, “...in humility regard others as better than yourselves.” (Phil 2:3). Even in Paul's day humility was not a characteristic to be rewarded in the greater culture. It was often seen as weakness. Today we rarely hear of someone being celebrated for his/her humility.

In 1974 there was a remarkable example of humility “when poet Adrienne Rich gave her acceptance speech for the National Book Award in poetry, having beaten out fellow nominees Audre Lorde and Alice Walker. She shocked the literary community when she began, ‘We, Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich, and Alice Walker, together accept this award in the name of all women whose voices have gone and still go unheard in a patriarchal world.’ The

statement had been written by the three of them, and no matter who was named recipient, this was their statement. They said they believed that by supporting and giving to each other they could enrich each other's lives and work more than by competing against each other."²

Paul includes and cites the hymn to the Philippians to encourage them to do as Christ did and be who they were. Verses 6-11 are known as Paul's *kenosis* hymn—the self-emptying of Jesus' own will. It's a familiar passage, as we hear it every Palm Sunday for the Epistle lesson. It's a profound kind of love expressed in this hymn—a love *for* the other, a passion for justice and joy, a love beyond measure for the vulnerability and suffering of others. This is the kind of love to which Paul calls the Philippians. It's an emptying of self, such that one is overcome by the needs and pain and hopes of the other, as well as the injustices to the other, no matter who the other is. It's a call to lay aside the self and “...in humility regard others as better than yourselves.” (Phil 2:3).

In my reading this week I discovered an Anglican missionary named Florence Allshorn, who grew up in Sheffield, England. She's not someone who wrote many books or was known as a conference speaker. Many don't know

² David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds., Mike Graves in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year A, Volume 4* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 113.

of her work. She was a faithful missionary who taught other missionaries how to love the people they served. She served in Uganda in the 1920's, teaching children at a girls' school. She founded St. Julian's Community, now in West Sussex, England—a place of retreat for women. She continued teaching missionaries through 1940 and died on July 3, 1950.

You know another reading of Paul's about love from 1st Corinthians 13:1-13—Love is patient, love is kind, etc. For a whole year Florence Allshorn read the passage from 1 Corinthians 13 every day. ***Every day for a year*** she read Paul's words to the people of Corinth in deepening her faith. Her central belief was captured in her own words, "we are made to love as the stars are made to shine." Her teachings were based on this belief.

She also said on the eve of her last illness, "The Holy Spirit is not something that stands by itself, something that we can pray for and have as a thing in itself, it is born from Love and is of Love, all its treasurers are of Love, and if we are to believe our Gospels it is received by Love and Love only."³

Florence Allshorn and Paul speak powerfully of Love.

The question for you and me as modern-day Christians is how do we do that today? How do we act and be such that others see Christ in us with that

³ Florence Allshorn, compiled by Hannah Ward and Jennifer Wild, *Resources for Preaching and Worship: Year A*; and Eleanor Brown, "The Legacy of Florence Allshorn," *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*, (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, Gerald H. Anderson, 1998).

kind of love that changes our world for the better? I invite you to ponder that call in your heart.

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” That’s a lifelong charge for us all—work that you and we do together in this place. Together we learn to live in such a way that people see Christ in us—to be obedient to all that Christ professed—to *know and live* this book of rules that the good boy only wanted to see. Amen.