

Nativity Lutheran Church  
Palm Beach Gardens, FL  
March 25, 2018

Palm/Passion Sunday  
Text: Philippians 2:5-11  
Theme: AN EMPTIED KING

**<sup>5</sup>Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup>who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, <sup>7</sup>but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, <sup>8</sup>he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross.**

**<sup>9</sup>Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup>so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup>and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

### In Nomine Jesu

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“Let the same mind be in you ...” St. Paul begins. Good advice, I guess, but it depends on what kind of mind we’re talking about, right?

For example, if we thought that the self-seeking greed of high rollers ... the kind of self-seeking greed that did so much to topple the lives of vast multitudes of our US citizens ... the one in the well-remembered recent past before that flawed real estate bubble burst ... if we thought that such self-seeking greed was only a 21<sup>st</sup> century phenomenon, today’s second lesson puts the lie to that idea. Fact is - that kind of greed has been at the core of disrupted lives and relationships since the dawn of time.

You can call to mind the Garden of Eden, for starters. And in this text, it’s clear that the serpent is still “alive and stalking the Garden” in Philippi. So, and with no small degree of irony – **precisely** because of the hope he has that’s driven from his encouragement in Christ, and **precisely** because he has consolation from love, sharing the Spirit, compassion, and sympathy – St. Paul’s call is for making his joy complete. How? By our living together in harmony, focused on the cross of Jesus and its absolutely incalculable gifts for us.

But let’s start with a reality check. How’s that serpent’s “persistent stalking” in your lives ... your homes, your daytime digs, your recreation moments, your world, your city, your neighborhood, this congregation? Any evidence that Paul’s plea could use a fresh hearing where you live? My bet is that there’s plenty of evidence. And maybe even in your heart ... at least if it’s at all like mine.

So where does St. Paul turn to suggest a hopeful outcome? ... in Philippi, in your life, your heart, your home, this community of faith? Well, he calls upon us to

think about that Lord of Life as he paints his "Jesus portrait" in the middle of today's text. Through his word painting we see Jesus walking in humility on the way that leads him inexorably to the cross ... as God and yet as man. And we hear St. Paul's word that honors him as our Lord and calls us to the same humility and servanthood as Christ Jesus. Yes, St. Paul is painting quite a picture with words today. It's a word-picture of **AN EMPTIED KING**.

If you think about it, that's a really strange picture, isn't it. I mean, of all the words we might associate with "king," surely "empty" isn't one of them. Full, maybe. Full of money. Full of power. Full of state dinners. Full of public life and full of honor of all sorts. But, for sure these days, we don't think of kings as "empty." We don't even think of Presidents or mayors (or even bosses or parents) that way.

Yet St. Paul talks about this **EMPTIED KING** – Christ Jesus. And, more than that, a king who emptied himself ... who didn't have it done to him. A king who emptied himself of all the things kings are full of and even more. You see, he wasn't just a king, but is, in fact – ironically – the King. He is Lord of all. In fact he is God. And that King – our Lord and Savior – gave up everything. He even chose not to do the "God things" that he could have done at any time and all the time ... even, especially, with his life on the line.

Why? Not so everybody would feel sorry for him. Not just as some sort of change of pace. But for a very practical purpose. And that purpose was so that he would be able to bring to life a kingdom of emptied disciples. "What?" – you say? That's right. Emptied folk, forged in and by his own example. He came among us and gave us everything for himself, so that he could – remember the irony, now – give it all to us.

But that's taking the story a bit further than we want to go right now. This idea of being **AN EMPTIED KING** is too important to let go of. Let's try this. How many of you have – or had – boxes of toys at home? Do you like to – no matter how young or old you are – play with them? Well, let me ask you something about those toys. Can you play with them while they're still closed up in the box? Can you? Of course not! We all know that unless you take your toys out of the box they really don't do you much good, right?

Well, right now St. Paul is trying to tell us the same thing about Jesus. He's trying to tell us that when Jesus was born and lived on our earth and when he suffered and died for our sins, he was emptying himself for us. Paul is reminding us that if Jesus hadn't emptied himself, it wouldn't have done us any good at all.

But he's also reminding us that since Jesus did empty himself – St. Paul calls it "humbling himself" – Jesus was able to do the greatest thing of all time for us.

Free us from sin. Give us the sure promise of living with him forever and really being "alive" as his people while we're on this earth. Why? It sounds so simple, but it'll take us all our lifetimes to appreciate. Why? It's because we don't have to ever worry about whether we can be forgiven any more.

That's something else St. Paul is reminding us about. Forgiveness. He's reminding us that we've really needed it in the past and that, since we aren't and never will be perfect, we still need it and always will.

Here's one way you can think of it with me. If you've ever lived or visited up North in the late Winter and into Spring, you can well remember one of those first hints of days of Spring each year. You're hoping Winter is going to be over soon ... no more snow and ice and all that cold, cold weather. And just thinking about Winter makes me think of when I first had a house and driveway to take care of – that's a nice word for "shoveling snow or chopping ice." Well, as the Winter got worse I noticed that there were all sorts of bumps in the driveway ... I later learned they're called "frost heaves."

And what I noticed was that when it got warm enough during the end of Winter especially, snow would melt and water would fill them up and then when it got cold again it would turn to ice. And then the driveway would be really slick and dangerous. So I got this bright idea that I'd sweep the water out of those bumps whenever they filled up to keep the ice away and the driveway safer. But do you know what? Every time I'd sweep the water out, some more water would find its way back into those holes and bumps.

Forgiveness, and our need for it, is sort of like that. Our sins are like the water in those bumps. When those sins are forgiven by God because of what Jesus did for us in dying on Calvary and rising from the dead on Easter, it's sort of like sweeping the water out of those bumps. Just like only God can really bring an end to frozen up driveways, only God can finally and fully sweep our sins away.

And you and I are pretty much like those bumps in another way. Just as they seemed to fill up with water again right away in my driveway, we seem to see our lives fill up with sin again so that God has got to sweep it out of our lives again. Yes, we always seem to need this process called "repentance" and "forgiveness." But what's really great is that God is always just as ready to forgive us. And that's what's really important.

But now let's get back to our discussion about **AN EMPTIED KING**. Remember how St. Paul started his word-picture? It was with these words:

**Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus ...**

... and then he goes on to talk about being empty and humble and doing and living love and about us being servants like Jesus was a servant for us. And that's, you see, the rest of the point St. Paul wants to make for us today.

To simply **remember** that Jesus did all of those things that **AN EMPTIED KING** did for us isn't enough. It's just got to **make a difference** in our lives. It can't help but **change** who and what we are. It can't help but **make us empty and humble and loving and serving** like Jesus was or ... or, well, dare we say it? ... or it really hasn't happened for us yet. We're still spiritually back in that "wet again" driveway kind of life with all the frost heaves.

Which is simply another way of saying that just to say the words "Jesus is our Lord" isn't the whole story. If he's really our Lord, then our lives are going to show it. It won't be just our voices saying it. Our lives are going to have him and his ways as a permanent part of what we do and what we are every day and every place of our lives.

Let me make one thing clear, though. This doesn't mean that Jesus wants us to be less than we really are, somehow less than human beings. He wants us really to be human – human the way we were created to be. Really to be the kind of people that show everyone else by what we are and what we do that somehow being forgiven – knowing **AN EMPTIED KING** in our lives – has made us very, very special people. People who care. People who love. People who serve.

OK, we've talked about a lot of things these last minutes. Let's pull them together now and be sure we remember them. We talked about toy boxes and said that they really don't do much for us if they aren't emptied. And we said that Jesus had to empty himself to really do for us what had to be done ... namely, to win forgiveness for us. And we remembered that we need forgiveness every day, over and over again. Just like my driveway bumps needed sweeping out again and again. And then we said that somehow this whole business of being forgiven through our **EMPTIED KING** can't help but make a difference in the way we live.

May we all be blessed to be blessings for others! ... as was our **EMPTIED KING**. Now we give attention to St. Mark's account of our Savior emptying himself, even to death, for us and for our salvation. [St. Mark 14:1 – 15:47] We ponder that narrative as we join in speaking designated parts of it before we leave worship in silence today.

In the Name of Jesus.

AMEN.

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Soli Deo Gloria