

**April 1, 2012
Palm Sunday**

"At the Name of Jesus Every Knee Should Bow"

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

Dour attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross! ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Have you ever tried to back up a trailer with a car or truck? If you have, you know that you need to back up the truck the opposite way if you want the trailer to turn. It is counterintuitive. It goes against our normal way of thinking.

The Christian faith is also counterintuitive. It goes against the normal way of thinking. Woven into my existence at birth is the idea that God will love me and accept me if I do the right things to please him, just as people will love and accept me if I do the right things to please them. Then the Holy Spirit opens my mind and heart to believe in something totally the opposite. I am led to believe that Jesus, our God and Lord, has come down to this earth to go to a cross to remove all my sin. I believe I am accepted by your God on the basis on what Christ has done and not what I do. That is totally counterintuitive. It flies in the face of every religion in the world.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday the people thought he was coming to be crowned their king. The exact opposite happened. By the end of the week the crowds were joining their leaders in shouting out "Crucify him! Crucify him!" It was counterintuitive to believe in a Messiah that would offer his life as a sacrifice on the cross to pay for sin.

This morning I would have you think of something else that goes against our ordinary way of thinking. Look at Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a lowly beast of burden. Now think of him coming someday on clouds of glory with all his holy angels. On that day every knee will bow and every tongue will have to confess that Jesus is Lord, even those who rejected him.

Jesus humbled himself

This morning we watch Jesus ride into Jerusalem and our breath is taken away when we think of how he humbled himself. Paul wrote the dear Christians in Philippi and reminded them of what Jesus did with these words, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who being in the very nature of God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing." In a previous verse to this section Paul wrote, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider

others better than yourselves." I brought this meter along with me. Let's call it our joy meter. How can we increase our joy in life? One way is to not think about our needs as much as much we think about the needs of other people. Just as Jesus gave himself for us, we give ourselves to others.

The real heart and core of our joy is not in what we do for others. The greater joy comes to us when we focus on who Jesus is and what he has done for us. Paul says that Jesus is God with the words "Who being in the very nature of God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped." Jesus is not just a man riding into Jerusalem. He is God because he had the form of God. He looked like God because he could perform miracles, and he could look into the minds of people, and he existed from all eternity as God's Son. He did not have to think about grasping or grabbing for equality to God because that was already his. We think of the prophecy of Jesus' birth in Isaiah 9:6 that says, "For unto us a child is born, and unto us a Son is given, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father."

Think about it. The almighty God rides into Jerusalem on a lowly donkey. It is totally counterintuitive to believe that a man riding a donkey into Jerusalem is your Lord and God. Yet, you believe this with all your heart. You are so convinced that this is true. This is a miracle of God's grace that defines you as a Christian.

You look at Jesus and with eyes of faith given by the Holy Spirit and you see him making himself nothing. Could it be that the hands of God that created the world in which we live are now holding on to one of his created creatures to keep from falling? Yes, that is exactly what is happening. Jesus emptied himself. He became fully human. He had to walk from place to place in sandals. He did not just glide along. He was hungry and thirsty. He prayed to his heavenly Father for strength. He even allowed himself to be tempted as we are yet he was always without sin.

It is so against our normal way of thinking to believe that this King of kings and Lord of lords would come to our world and become one of us. Yet it happened. It really happened. The Word became flesh and dwelled among us: "Taking on the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness." He took on the form of a servant. See your majestic King coming to you and bowing down before you to serve you. The night before he died Jesus bent down and washed his disciples' feet to show them the full extent of his love for them and his willingness to serve them.

On Friday we heard the news that one of our soldiers in Afghanistan gave his life to save an Afghan girl who had run in front of a large truck and was in danger of being run over. The soldier jumped down in front of the truck to push the girl away. She survived, but he was crushed to death leaving behind three children of his own. As noble as this act was it does not compare to what our Savior did for us.

"He humbled himself and became obedient to death even death on the cross." Are my eyes deceiving me? Could it be true? Is that my Lord and God hanging on the cross with my sins placed on him and the sins of the whole world? Is that my Lord and God suffering the punishment for my forgiveness and peace? How far will he go for me? He went all the way to suffer the torments of hell itself as he became a curse for us. Today we are sitting

here astounded that such a plan would completely forgive the huge debt we accrue with our daily lives of sin. It goes against all of normal way of thinking. It is counterintuitive. The preaching of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing.

There are days when we are overwhelmed at the enormity of the debt of sin we have accumulated. Things we have done wrong in the past rise up to haunt us. There are the harsh words spoken to a brother or sister when you were a child, or the unloving comments to a mother or father, or lack of patience and understanding to a husband or wife. Could Jesus really forgive those sins of the past that are deeply embedded in your life? Could he forgive all the failed opportunities to show love and kindness? Everything inside of us says, "No, that is impossible. It cannot be done. It is too great of a task." But then we focus on these words before us this morning that tell us Jesus can do the impossible. "He became obedient to death, even death on the cross.

Jesus was exalted

As Jesus rides into Jerusalem it is not a solemn ride to death, it is a glorious ride to victory for Jesus is confident the heavenly Father will raise him from the dead after he completes his work of rescuing us. "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Could it be that there is a smile on the face of Jesus as he rides into Jerusalem fully aware of what will be facing him soon? That too is counterintuitive; it does not make sense, unless you understand how Jesus has his eyes focused on the glory that will soon be his.

Jesus saw that glory as he spoke his last words from the cross. We are told that Jesus spoke with a loud voice, "Father into your hands I commit my spirit." Yes, we can almost see a smile on his face as he spoke these final words of triumph. The book of Hebrews tells us "For the joy set before him he endured the cross and the shame." The night before he died he prayed fervently to his heavenly Father, "And now Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began."

It will happen and we hope it will happen soon "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and earth and under the earth." Paul knew what it was like to have his life changed from someone who hated the name of Jesus to someone who loved the name of Jesus and bowed the knee before him. Oh, how he hated the Christians with a passion as he rode from Jerusalem to Damascus to find Jews who had become Christians. His plan was to arrest them, take them back to Jerusalem and put them to death. But then a bright light appeared to him and a voice from that light said, "Saul, Saul, why are persecuting me?" Being a Hebrew of the Hebrews he calls out to that voice with the words, "Lord, who are you?" The voice that came back to him said, "I am Jesus." In a miracle of God's Christ he was transformed from someone who wanted to eradicate the name of Jesus to someone who bowed the knee before Jesus as his Lord and God.

It is happening all over the world in these last days. The Holy Spirit is leading people to look into the Bible and see that Jesus is who he says he is, our Lord and God. They are bowing before him and when Easter morning comes they will join other Christians all over

the world to sing, "Crown him with many crowns, for he is Lord of all."

When Jesus comes again on clouds of glory, everyone will acknowledge Jesus as Lord and God. "Every knee should bow of things in heaven and earth and under the earth." Yes, even Satan and his host of demons will acknowledge that Jesus is Lord and God when he returns in glory. Also those who have rejected him during their time of grace on this earth will have to confess that he is Lord and God. In fear they will cry out for the mountains to fall on them and the hills to cover them. For them it will be too late. Jesus delays his coming so more people come to see him as their Lord and God now before the end comes and it is too late. He gives us his name and tells us to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria and to the ends of the earth." That too is counterintuitive. Jesus has not committed the important work of promoting his glorious name to angels. He has given this job to you and me. May the name of Jesus be exalted in your life this coming week as the Holy Spirit leads you to a deeper appreciation of his death and resurrection. Amen.