

Parishes of St Philips and All Saints Kew with St Luke's Kew

Where all God's children are Welcome

Bible Study for the second week of the Covid 19 church building closure

Section 3: Philippians 2: 5-11

Prayer: Teach us, good Lord, so to know our Saviour, Jesus Christ, that we may love as he loves us, and live as he lived. Amen

Read the passage through twice.

Philippians 2: 5-11

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus:

- ⁶Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
⁷rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
⁸And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!
⁹Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Background

Paul knew the church in Philippi very well. He had spent a rather dramatic time in the city, where he was arrested and thrown into prison on trumped up charges (Acts 16). During the night there was an earthquake that broke everyone's chains, but none escaped, and the jailer and his entire family converted to Christianity. They, along with Lydia, a faithful Jewish woman to whom Paul and Luke had already spoken, were the nucleus of the church at Philippi. Paul's letter to them is full of joy and encouragement. It is one of the most positive of all his letters, indicating a worshipping community who knew exactly what they were doing, and where their faith was taking them.

Some questions:

- Paul is encouraging the Christians in Philippi to have the same mindset as Jesus, as he attempts to put across the very difficult concept of Jesus being both human and divine. When you think of Jesus, which side of him do you tend to favour? Do you generally see a human being when you read the Gospels, or God walking around Israel?
- Gentiles had grown up with all sorts of stories of gods and goddesses turning themselves into other creatures, sometimes human, sometimes animal or plants, usually to serve their own selfish purposes. This, Paul emphasises, is not the case with Christ. He takes on the form of a slave, one who has no freedom, who physically belongs to someone else, so that in his complete humility, he could embrace death, the worst death of all in the ancient world. In your reading of the Gospels, do you see a humble Christ?
- The way this passage is laid out reflects a body of thinking that it is either an excerpt from an early Christian hymn, or a credal statement. How does this aspect affect your reaction to the text?
- How can Christ "empty himself"?

- The trajectory of this passage is relentlessly downwards, culminating in the double use of the word “death” in one line, to underline just how low Christ has sunk. However, the “therefore” which follows it is triumphant, and Christ literally rises up from the tomb to the heights of heaven, because of his self-abasement in life and in death. For you, is the cross a victory or a defeat for Christ? Both are possible ways to understand the event – make the argument for both.
- How does this depiction of a humble, emptied Christ sit with Christ on a donkey, entering Jerusalem in triumph?
- Christ is due all the praise that all creation can possibly offer. The one who was the slave of all has become the one to whom “every knee shall bow”. As we enter Holy Week, how can this trajectory be traced in our own lives?
- Paul does not use the word “love” in this passage – could he? If he infers it, where is divine love to be found?

Reread the passage, out loud if possible

To review:

- Paul wants the Christians in Philippi to see Christ in a new way.
- The humility of Christ is his starting point, which leads to Christ’s inevitable triumph.
- That humility is what is supposed to characterise the Church, both worldwide and in its local expression. Does it?

Prayer: Generous God, in Christ you make all things new. Foster in us a true perception of who we are in your great love and your great plan for all creation. Keep us humble and focussed on Christ, that we may walk in his footsteps and reveal his love in all we say and do. Amen.

Fr Peter 3.4.2020