

**Mar. 28, 2021
Christ the Servant, Reston
Passion Sunday
Philippians 2:5-11**

In the Middle Ages it was unlikely that you would ever be called before a king or queen. But if you were, there was a strict protocol to follow. First, one had to approach the throne, stopping at a predetermined distance, then bow or curtsy to the royals. A bow was defined as a deep bend of the head and neck, more than just a nod. A curtsy was performed by placing the right foot behind the left heel, with the knees bent slightly. Then one was to proceed toward the throne where cushions were placed. A second bow or curtsy was required; finally, one knelt on the cushions. The king or queen would then conduct their business with you while you were on your knees. When you were finished with your business, you were to back out of their presence with one final bow or curtsy.

The reason one bows or kneels is because one's head is never to be higher than the king or queen's head. The reason one backs out of a room is that one is never to turn one's back on royalty.

Today's lesson from Philippians speaks of kneeling before the name of Jesus. The reading is actually a snippet from the oldest Christian hymn – a song which proclaims that, “at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.” Jesus isn't just King. He is King of Kings. He isn't just Lord. He is Lord of Lords.

This all sounds so grand and glorious. We need to do all this bowing and kneeling and curtsying for our royal redeemer – until, that is, we see that Jesus didn't see himself that same way. Even though he was in the form of God, the hymn tells us, he “did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, ” scripture says, “taking the form of a slaver, being born in

human likeness. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even the death on the cross.”

This is not some king sitting under a bejeweled crown on a velvet throne. This is a lone man riding to his death on a donkey. He has no crown, no silken robes, no golden rings. He simply bumps along on a dusty road on a beast of burden.

This is not Christ the King Sunday. This is Palm (or Passion) Sunday. This is maybe the *antithesis* of Christ the King Sunday. This is a Sunday on which we consider not so much Jesus’ royalty or divinity, but his humanity. This Sunday we do not consider the one who rose from the death to sit at the right hand of God, but the one who emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. Maybe, too, this is the Sunday to consider the essence of our own humanity.

Consider how today’s epistle begins: “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” That is sort of like, “What Would Jesus Do?” only better. “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” And what kind of a mind was that? It was a mind which valued humility and servitude and meekness and modesty. It was a mind which valued the human over the superhuman.

You and I live in a society which values just the opposite – the superhuman over the human. It wasn’t always this way. Once it was sufficient to provide food for family and a warm place out of the rain. Now, achievement and attainment have become our values. Providing for family is no longer sufficient. Now we must have careers and larger homes and more cars and smarter kids. We value being superhuman. Oh, we say we don’t. But we do. And I am wondering if you and I don’t need to get back to being more human.

It’s ok, for instance, to fail at something. Failing is one of the best ways we have to learn what doesn’t work and to do better. It’s ok to cry. Crying shows that we have empathy and sympathy and a whole other host of emotions which go along with loving one another. We need to be able to hurt in a healthy

way and by that I mean finding meaning in the suffering which comes our way in life.

We need also to spend less time trying to be everywhere and spend more time trying to be *fully* there. We are everywhere with our minds. When other people are talking, we are thinking about what we are going to say next. We need to be fully there for people. We seem to be a multitasking people who drive while chatting on the phone and who start our days with fifty trifling things to do rather than one meaningful one. Being everywhere for our family – driving to school, driving to soccer, driving to play practice, driving to choir – being everywhere isn't the same thing as being fully there.

Are you fully present for your children, for your spouse, for your parents – engaging them in meaningful conversation, concentrating and focusing on what they are telling you. Also, we measure ourselves on our ability to fix things in life rather than our ability to be genuinely present for another person when we can't fix things. We are not superhuman. We cannot always fix things. But we are human and we can be human for others. We are a people who would rather control people than connect with them. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. Jesus didn't control people. He connected with them.

These things you and I are guilty of doing – trying to be superhuman, trying to be everywhere, trying to control – these are precisely the things which Jesus surrenders, gives up. “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”

Our children see what we do with our own spiritual lives. So, if we dedicate our lives to getting ahead, getting around, and getting the upper hand, our children will, too. But if what our children see in us is humanity, humility, and sacrifice – they will to. If we want our children to have faith, we need to let them see our faithfulness. We need to let our faith multiply.

When Queen Victoria lived in Balmoral Castle in Scotland she sometimes liked to walk through the surrounding countryside incognito: no heralds, no guards, no ladies-in-waiting – just her one faithful servant, following at a

discreet distance. One day, while on one of these “walkabouts,” Queen Victoria came across a flock of sheep being driven by a boy. The queen accidentally got in front of the flock of sheep. When that happened, the boy shouted, “Get out of the, you stupid old lady.”

Queen Victoria smiled, said nothing, and moved on. Her servant came along, scandalized, and told the boy he had just insulted Queen Victoria. “Well,” said the boy, “if she expects to be treated like a queen she ought to dress like a queen.”

If you and I were in the crowds that day on Palm Sunday we probably wouldn’t recognize Jesus. He wore no fancy clothes. He didn’t ride in a coach. He had no crown. He rode on a horse much too small for him. In a short while his only crown would be made of thorns. We might even ask him to get out of our way so we could see Jesus entering the city triumphally. On this Passion Sunday we have a king who comes to us as a humble servant. “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”