

The Anatomy of Christ - Mind, Heart and Body: Part 1
Palm Sunday – March 24, 2013
Caldwell Presbyterian Church
Rev. John Cleghorn

Text: Philippians 2:5-11

I don't know about you but there is something about Palm Sunday that always catches me a little by surprise. We try each year to practice our faith more intentionally over the 40 days of Lent that bring us to today. Still, life's busyness inevitably clouds that journey. Work responsibilities. Family joys, concerns and duties. News events. Events in the life of our church family, as we have had this week. They all distract us.

Now, all of a sudden it seems, we are here with Palms in our hands. It is time to think about the events of Holy Week - our Lord's last communion with his loyal apostles, his betrayal, arrest, trial, torture, crucifixion and dying words. Then, in what may seem like the blink of an eye, we will be here next week, dressed in our Easter best with "Alleluias!" on our tongues and in our hearts. How DID we get here so fast?

It is, of course, not just a matter of the passage of these next seven days. To think of it only in those terms would be both a waste of time and a waste of faith. Here at Caldwell, it's not uncommon to hear members describe our ministries as our efforts to be "the body of Christ." This is a powerful image and it seems to have taken hold with many of you. It fits our personality trait that we can talk and pray about something for only so long. That's one reason we are deepening our understanding of what it means to be a missional and transformative church.

But to be the body of Christ, don't we first need to understand what it is to have the mind of Christ? And to be the body of Christ, don't we first need to understand what it means to be the heart of Christ? After all, what good are arms and legs without the right mind and the right heart to guide and direct them?

So, today, at our Tenebrae service this Thursday and next Sunday, I invite you to walk with me as we consider the anatomy of Christ – mind, heart and body. Don't worry. I made low grades in science classes. So it won't be that kind of anatomy lesson. But the 'test' will be cumulative, so you won't want to miss either of the two remaining services in this series.

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A few minutes ago, we heard Joyce read the story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. It's one of those stories that provide a feast for our senses even if we are only reading it. We can hear the hubbub of the village at the Mount of Olives, people trading their wares, exchanging the news of the day. Surely there was a food vendor there, offering a fare that was a fragrant to the nose as it was tasty to the mouth.

Over there tied to a post is the little colt. He has his own smell. Perhaps he has a nervous bay. We can hear the colt's owner exclaim in protest when the disciples start to untie the colt, then things settle down when the disciples tell the owner that the Lord has use of his animal.

Now, all of a sudden, as Jesus rides the colt down the dusty road, people are throwing their cloaks on the ground in praise. What was the monotone of the stone is transformed by the many colors of the cloaks. Red and yellow and purple and blue. Then we hear the multitude sing, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"

It must have all been so sensory, so physical and tangible. But let us not be distracted by the sights and sounds. After all, it is the mind of Christ we are after today. In the midst of it all, what must Christ have been thinking?

Perhaps he was thinking about the parade that was happening on the other side of town, a very different kind of procession. There the Roman army marched into Jerusalem, formed in columns, bearing armor, a show of force – at least political and military force - lest anyone think that the big Passover festival might be an opportune time for an insurrection. Or, perhaps Jesus was pondering what kind of events lay in store for him in this city where he would find and meet his destiny. What was Jesus thinking, what roiled his mind as he heard the colts hooves take him down that path, step by step by step? Clomp. Clomp Clomp.

Years later, the apostle Paul offered his answer to that question. Imprisoned for preaching the Jesus way, Paul kept encouraging the Christian communities he had started. One such community was in the Roman colony of Philippi. Some there were preaching more about the Law than the new covenant that God gave in Christ. So, from his prison cell, out of love for the Philippians and love for Jesus, Paul wrote to remind them about the mind of Christ.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,

taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross. (Phil. 2:5-8)

This passage is known as the “Christ hymn” and many scholars believe Paul was actually quoting it from another source. Regardless, it is a beautiful expression of the mind of Christ.

Now, it would all be easy for us to view these events from a safe distance. We can say that we can't really have the mind of Christ. We can find all sorts of ways to differentiate ourselves and our circumstance from what Paul says in those verses. Paul really could have only meant Jesus, we can tell ourselves. Since Jesus was both fully human and fully divine, we might say, Paul is talking about Jesus humbling himself in a way we never could.

Or, we might tell ourselves, Paul was talking about the exact circumstance Jesus was in as he faced his destiny. Surely, Paul can't be talking about us when he says that part about emptying ourselves to make room for God and God's purposes.

Reading this Christ hymn that way would, at the very least, be convenient. It would allow us to pole vault over the messy events of Holy Week and land back here next Sunday without so much as a scratch. That way we get the alleluia without the agony. We get resurrection without restitution. We get the grace without recognizing the cost.

Yes, that *would* be pretty cool trick. Pretty slick. But that's not at all what Paul was saying to the Philippians. It's not what Paul is saying to us. And it certainly isn't true to the mind of Christ.

So let's back up and try that again.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited

“Let the same mind be in you,” says Paul. “Let the same mind be in you.”

Paul seems to think we are capable of this same submission. Christ, Paul goes on to say,

“emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death –
even death on a cross.

Yes, Paul *does* seem clear. That we *can*, as he says, *empty* ourselves. That we *are* able to imitate Christ, that we *can* reject the idols that separate us from God – idols such as work, such as material things, such as wealth or health or looks; idols such as busy-ness, self-centeredness and meaningless distraction; idols such as political opinions and ideology; idols such as anger, self-righteousness and an inability to forgive.

And, Paul doesn't even stop there. He seems to think that there actually is more we can do, such as stooping low to help others, for Christ himself stooped lower than all of us, taking the form of a slave. Paul does seem to think we can humble ourselves, as one commentator says, to evacuate our ego and listen first and foremost to God's will for our lives as individuals and as a called and sent community.

Sure, we always have that other option. We can put down our palm and take up that pole and pole vault right over, high above all the messiness of Holy Week, and then land right back here next Sunday, neat and clean. We can allow the distractions of our lives to help these days pass without much thought, without much prayer, without much penitence. Yes, we can leave our palms right here because, after all, we came only for the parade.

Or we keep our palms as badges of our discipleship, at least our aspirations to discipleship. Make that provisional badges, as we are all still learning. You see we don't have to be experts in faith to walk these days *with* Jesus, truly walking *through* them, beginning here, beginning now, today, on the road into Jerusalem, recommitting to truly emptying ourselves, truly humbling ourselves, truly stooping as low as we can go to serve others, even as low as a slave in the service of our Lord.

That, friends, is what it means to have the mind of Christ. It is part of what it means to seek to be the body of Christ.

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On the cover of today's bulletin, you will find a graphic treatment of Paul's words from Philippians. Take a moment to look at it, for it is a roadmap of sorts for the next seven days, moving from left to right.

Philippians 2:5-11

Let the same mind be in you that was in
Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of
God, did not regard equality with
God as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself, taking the form
of a slave being born in human likeness.

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

And being found in human form, he humbled himself and
became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross.

On the left, we begin with Jesus, as those called to have the same mind of Christ. Then, line by line, step by step, we descend with Christ, even to the dark night of his arrest and from there the cross. There, at the low point, is where we will re-gather here on Thursday night to dwell with Jesus in the darkness of his rejection by mankind.

You can see for yourself what happens from there, as Paul's words lead us back out of the darkness and up to the glory of the grace of God. But let us not go too fast, lest we forget the true cost of God's grace in Christ. About that Dietrich Bonhoeffer had this to say:

“Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it cost a man his life, and it is grace because it gives (us all) the only true life.”

So, friends, the path is stretched out before us, there for us to follow, if we dare. See you along the way. In Christ, Amen.