

Prayer of the Day:

We praise you, O God, for the great acts of love by which you redeemed us through your Son, Jesus Christ. As he was acclaimed by those who scattered their garments and branches of palm in his path, so may we always hail him as our King and follow him with perfect confidence; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen!

Verse of the Day:

The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. (John 12:23)

Sermon Text:

What do you grasp? What do you hold onto tighter than anything else? We could put it another way. What is worth more than anything else to you? Or yet again what gives your life purpose and meaning? If you are like the vast majority of people out there you will probably answer, "family". The rest of the top five: Career, money, spirituality, and friends.

As we turn our attention to the words of Philippians this morning, on a morning when we recall Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey amid the pilgrims who had come to the city for the Passover. Paul turns the attention to Jesus, as he usually does. And there he reminds us that Jesus didn't consider something worth holding onto. In so doing perhaps a question arises in the mind, well then what did He worth holding onto? What is worth everything to God?

Before we launch into the words of our God this morning, perhaps a bit of a disclaimer is in order. We are probably going to be looking at things that in and of themselves aren't evil. Consider that list of the top five important things to Americans. Family is a blessing from the Lord. Career and Money: the very ways through which the Lord allows us to feel like we contribute to society and support our family and church and help our neighbor. Spirituality has become a fluffy term but time spent with God in His Word and sacraments is more valuable than anything else on the list and friends, well I hope you have a few and therefore understand the unimaginable benefit they provide. Yes, in and of themselves they are not evil but they all pose a serious threat if they become an idol.

Listen to the words which directly precede the words of our lesson today. *If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,* ² *then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.* ³ *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.* ⁴ *Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

Paul knows that the Philippians will need to be reminded to think not of themselves first but their neighbors. There is a reason for that. The Philippians are suffering from persecution. And persecution is one of the ways that Satan works hard to turn the 1st Commandment on its head. Instead of God first, others second, me later, suffering turns us inward. I need to survive so I will let God slide, maybe just to second, maybe to third, maybe farther down the list gotta hide Him so I don't get made fun of, don't get hurt, don't get (fill in the blank). Others? Well sure but only after I take care of my needs. See how it

Text: Philippians 2:5-11

⁵ Your 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.

forgets that service often includes sacrifice. That's a hard lesson. One, if we're honest, we fail at far more often than we want to admit and sadly from far less than the persecution of the unbelieving world around us.

So in comes our lesson today. Paul says, “⁵ *Your 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!*”

Paul reminds us of the unfathomable perfection of Jesus Christ, who is God over all (that's a whole other sermon). Still, though He is God and all things belong to Him, all glory and majesty and power are rightly His and He should never suffer for even a second because of that. Yet, that was not something that He needed to grasp, to hold onto tightly and refuse to let go. He even goes so far as to set the full use of all that majesty, power, and glory aside take on the nature of a servant, a humble created thing, a human being and die. And no, not a highly exalted death but that of a common criminal hung on a cross and tortured, slowly robbed of breath as his lungs filled with fluid until He died. This says Paul is what your attitude should be like: always the will of my Father in heaven, the good of others before me. The Philippians were struggling in persecution with that very thought. How about you?

I'm awful at this! Oh, I try to. I try to keep God first. I try to put the needs of others before my own. But to die for any of it? Well, now we find what is worth holding on to for each of us. Some random on the street corner, probably not. A friend? maybe. A family member? Probably, I mean who really knows what we would do until the actual situation should arise, but I'm pretty confident I would. But if I'm honest death is the easy one. I mean I don't have to suffer long-term here. What if I had to linger in some humiliating position lower than I am. What if the suffering were physical, mental, emotional on a long-term basis? Would I do it for my family? Would I do it for my God? Would I do it without complaint? Does an idol stare at me in the mirror every morning? I know the answer.

But this is exactly why Jesus does it. It's because I can't, not perfectly! My attitude is far too often far from His. So Jesus sets aside everything that rightly belongs to Him. It started all the way back in our celebration at Christmas but we see it again today. Oh, sure the crowds sing their “Hosannas” but is it anything like the song of the angels? Even the word harkens to the reason He has come. Hosanna means, “Please, save us!” And so He will, riding in on the back of a donkey. Every time He looks down that distinctive marking on its back, a cross. Oh, it may be hidden by the cloak that has been thrown over the animal but it's there. It's the reason He has come. He has come to die. He has come to suffer. For the family that raised Him, for the Friends who would disown Him, yes, even for the man on the corner who never met Him but is fully known by Him. Even for the countless number in the multitude yet unborn for all humanity past, present, and future. For YOU dear Christian He rides into Jerusalem to die.

And when it is all done, when it is finished and the body is laid in the tomb. Well, Paul tell us. 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.* He has rebalanced everything. Changed hearts overcome by sin. Completed the work on our behalf that we might live not in fear but in love, in gratitude, in thanks keeping Him first (how could we not), others second (if they were so important to Him then they will be important to us), and yes, ourselves later (He'll take care of us. Has perfectly taken care of us. Why doubt that He would continue to do exactly that?)

It all starts today. With the palms and the crowds, the donkey and the hosannas. Dear friends, Jesus, God Himself is about to show us what is worth everything to Him. What He is willing even to set aside Himself for. And the answer ... It's YOU! Amen.