

Philippians 2:5-11
Palm Sunday
April 10, 2022

I've always enjoyed parades. As a child it was free entertainment that our family went to, a time to get away from the work and isolation of summer on the farm. I liked the seeing the floats and firetrucks and big machinery and patriotic displays. And then there was the candy that some entries tossed along the way. Later I enjoyed being in parades, marching in the band in school years or since then greeting people along the route with our congregational promotions.

Palm Sunday brought the festive atmosphere of a parade as the crowds welcomed Jesus to Jerusalem. But we know there was another side to it. He was coming to meet a horrible death before the week was out. So it was not just a time for fanfare and glory. As we consider Palm Sunday through the lens of the day's Second Lesson we say

FOLLOW THE WHOLE CHRIST

- I. Who suffered as Savior
- II. Who is glorified as Savior

Following the whole Christ means remaining loyal to him not only while the Palm Sunday crowd is singing, "Hosanna!" but also when the Good Friday mob demands, "Crucify him!" It is the one who suffered as Savior that we trust in. The Apostle described his state of humiliation. "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking on the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness." Jesus was true God from all eternity, one with and equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit. He lived in glory in heaven. Yet he chose to leave that existence and become a human being. It was no ordinary entrance into this world that he chose and certainly not fitting his person. We know the Christmas story well—Jesus arrived in a stable in Bethlehem.

His life was similar. He grew up in the common village of Nazareth. During his public ministry he traveled about the land with no real earthly place of belonging. Once he commented that the birds had their nests and the foxes had their holes, but he had nowhere to lay his head. His following was mostly common folk. He met rejection from many.

All those conditions existed even as he was true God. Our Lord didn't cease being divine when he took on human form. In Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form, the Bible tells us. All the while he was on earth, through every

experience, Jesus remained God. He didn't show off the fact, however. That's what the text meant by not considering his equality with God something to be grasped. Unlike us, who when we win a trophy, hold it high so everyone else can see it, most of the time he held back from using his divine powers. He lived as an ordinary human, enduring what we do: hunger, thirst, tiredness—everything except sin.

Some might advise him, that's not using what you have to its fullest advantage. We hear of top business executives drawing huge salaries and benefits packages, sports stars signing multi-million dollar contracts, people with expense accounts milking them for all they're worth. Try for all you can get is common advice. That wasn't Jesus' way. He humbled himself.

That humility reached its depth in this week we call Holy Week. "He became obedient to death—even death on a cross." The reading of the Passion History during our midweek services traced several of the preliminaries. One of his own disciples betrayed him to his enemies. The rest deserted him, despite their protests of loyalty. His trials, before both the Jewish and Roman courts, brought indignities. After finding him guilty of blasphemy, the members of the Jewish court spit at him and struck him. Before Pilate he was whipped. The soldiers put a crown of thorns on him, hit and mocked him. All this to God's own Son!

That wasn't the end, nor the worst. Death by crucifixion was the decree of the court. It was such a horrible way to die that the Romans wouldn't do it to one of their own citizens. Fastened to the cross by nails driven through hands and feet, victims hung there until their strength gave out and they couldn't hold themselves up to breathe any longer. That pain was only part of what Jesus suffered. He went through the pains of hell on the cross. His Father forsook him. Jesus was carrying the entire load of the world's sins and that's what made him hateful in God's sight.

Jesus allowed himself to experience it all because he wanted to save us from facing it. He humbled himself to carry out his Father's will. His time of prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane expressed his desire to obey God. Earlier he commented that his food was doing his Father's will. In addition, his love for us sinners produced the tremendous sacrifice. He suffered to be our Savior. Was there ever love like his?

As we follow him in faith, do we expect any different treatment than our leader? Hardly. Do we deserve any better? Certainly not. He was personally innocent of any wrongdoing. We have a big list of sins on our records. Time and again we have mistreated, neglected and harmed others. We act selfishly. We gossip. We

hate. Our treatment of God has been less than ideal. We oppose his standards, love ourselves and other things more than him. So when trouble comes, can we rightfully complain about deserving a better deal?

Aware of that fact, as well as influenced by our Savior's example, we live in humility. We say we would make great sacrifices for Christ and maybe it's true. What about doing so for other people? Recall that Jesus said what we do for them we are doing for him. In our daily relationships, in our work activities, does humble service describe our behavior? Or do we claw and fight for ourselves, showing no regard for anyone else? Adopt the same attitude of Christ, the text urged.

Doing so would go a long way toward improving relationships. Families, neighborhoods, yes also Christian congregations run more smoothly when we live in humility. How many problems don't result from people's insisting on their own rights and opinions? So what if you suffer a little personal inconvenience? Following the whole Christ means remembering he suffered as our Savior and also suffering with him.

II.

Lowliness was not all there was to Jesus' existence. It is important that we follow the whole Christ who is glorified as Savior. He entered a state of exaltation following his humiliation. "God exalted him to the highest place," wrote St. Paul. It started with his return to life which we will celebrate next Sunday. Jesus descended to hell to demonstrate his triumph to the devil and his cohorts. Showing that victory was glorious. Jesus appeared on earth to many followers in the ensuing days, prompting not only their amazement but strengthening their faith that it was true and receiving their praises. With his earthly task achieved, he returned to heaven, as far as his visible presence is concerned, where he rules at the right hand of his Father over the entire universe. He is in charge of all, the ruler supreme. In that command position he sees to it that everything happens for the benefit of us, his people. He redirects our sins and evil actions to serve a positive end. There is no one greater than our God. What comfort that brings when life seems to lurch out of control and bad things happen! Keep trusting in your Savior.

Now in his position of glory he receives honor. "At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." We readily recognize the glory that Jesus receives from Christians all over the world. Part of it sounds forth from our lips this morning and every time we praise God. That is only part of what is in store for him. The text mentioned also honor in heaven. The angels and the souls of departed believers surround his throne and sing to his glory.

What about the other sources of honor Paul mentioned, such as under the earth, or as every knee bows and every tongue confesses him? Will that really happen? Those verses look ahead to the final judgment. When Jesus returns in power and glory on the last great day for judgment of the world, no one will be able to deny his lordship, not his bitterest enemies, not even a demon in hell. All will then admit his position, whether they are happy about it or sad to do so. Already now the strong opposition of his enemies shows they don't regard him lightly.

The grandest glory to Jesus will happen in eternity as all believers praise him in the perfection of heaven, along with the angels. It is well deserved for all his work for us and will bring glory also to the Father who sent him here to save us.

This honor that he rightfully receives and which Paul foretells here underscores Jesus is truly all that we believe him to be. He is without equal. He is Lord over all. Have no doubts. Hold back nothing. Join the chorus of praise confessing Jesus Christ as Lord.

We honor more than his status. He is our Savior. His victory is our victory. When he defeated Satan and death, he did it for us. We have eternal life in him. We will have eternal glory. The Bible says, "Now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." Now we cannot see God and live because we are sinful and he is holy. The future change occurs in us. We will share in his holiness because he has cleansed us from sin. In heaven we will be free of sin and its effects. Only joy and blessings will be ours.

No wonder we praise him. Since we have God's sure promise our praises begin now. Glorify Christ as your Savior. The assured future affects each day now. We live in view of that heavenly glory. It sharpens our focus on matters spiritual. It lifts our spirits from the doldrums of life in a sin-infected world. We have peace amid the troubled times in which we live. Jesus Christ is Lord. He will take care of us and all his own. Our sins are forgiven, no matter how many or how awful. We can approach him in prayer, certain of the best answer. Even in suffering he is there, the one who went through the depths of misery for us so that we might have that peace and joy eternally. Know and follow the whole Christ, the Savior who suffered for your sins and lives eternally now in glory.