

JESUS IS... LORD
A SERMON BASED ON PHILIPPIANS 2:1-13
PREACHED AT CHIPPAWA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
NIAGARA FALLS, ONTARIO
SUNDAY, AUGUST 28, 2016
10:00 a.m.

The church in the city of Philippi
was arguably the apostle Paul's favourite church.
A great church.

The church in Galatia was all over the place.

Theologically and doctrinally,
they were losing sight of the gospel.

When Paul wrote to the church in Galatia,

he was angry.

He didn't even say hello, just barged right into the letter.

'I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting
the one who called you by the grace of Christ.'

'What on earth is going on there?'

The churches in Corinth and Thessalonica gave him grief.

Despite all he had done for them,

despite his ministry with them,

his faithful presentation of the gospel,

they questioned his stature.

His wisdom.

His preaching ability.

His intentions.

His heart.

In his second letter to the Corinthians you can hear his pain.

We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians,

and opened our hearts wide to you.

We are not withholding our affection from you,

but you are withholding yours from us.

As a fair exchange – I speak as to my children –

open wide your hearts also.

But the Philippians, ah the Philippians,

they were a breath of fresh air for him.

The church at Philippi – what a great church.

No real doctrinal problems.

Nobody eating meat sacrificed to idols,

or bragging about spiritual gifts like in Corinth.

Nobody slipping back into Judaism,

giving up on the faith, as in Galatia.

Nobody questioning the preacher's motives,

like in Thessalonica.

A great church.

Paul writes to them,

'I thank my God every time I remember you.

In all my prayers for all of you,

I always pray with joy

because of your partnership in the gospel,

from the first day until now,

being confident that he who began a good work in you,

will carry it on to completion,

until the day of Christ.

Finally, what looks like the perfect church, a great church

I don't know if you've heard the story about the man rescued
after 20 years as a castaway,

the only man, on a south Pacific island.

His rescuers were astonished

to find several impressive structures.

They asked him.

'Wow! What is that building overlooking the bay?

That is my home.

And what about that building over there,

with the spire.

That is my church.

And what about that building further down the beach,

with the bell tower?

What is that?

That is the church I used to go to.

But now we're at Philippi.

Philippi, what looks like, a perfect church.

But maybe more near perfect, almost great.

Because toward the back in chapter 4,

there's a hint of a problem,

there's a leak in the hull of the ship.

Water is getting in, threatening to sink them.

Paul draws attention to two women,

calls them by name in fact, essentially calls them out,

in this letter that would be read out loud in church,

in front of everyone.

Paul speaks to a leak he sees in the hull.

I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche

to agree with each other in the Lord.

And I ask you loyal friends,

to help these women

who have contended at my side, in the cause of the gospel.

A great church, well near great, almost great.

But how do you keep from sinking when you've sprung a leak?

It isn't unheard of in ancient times, to jettison the cargo.

Throw the cargo overboard. Make the ship lighter.

So in a ship tossed to and fro, the captain says,

'In order to save our lives,

the cargo must go.

All hands are on deck,

throwing overboard any and everything,

but the bare necessities.

Jettison the cargo.

If it gets bad enough,

throw the tackle overboard,

even the equipment,

eventually, the food stores.

How do you keep from sinking?

Empty it out.

Imagine the pioneers moving west,
trying to get to California and Oregon.
They come to the Rocky Mountains,
and the snow is beginning to fall.

Those Conestoga wagons are heavy,
squeaking wheels straining,
horses pulling;
they can go no farther.

They go up as high as they can,
but they cannot go up any higher.
The leader says, 'we're going to have to unburden
some of the wagons.
The children are crying.
The parents are crying.

But over into the rocks and into the ravine,
go furniture,
chests of precious things,
a piano.

They will sink,
they cannot move forward,
if they hold onto these things.

Paul pleads.

I plead with Euodia, I plead with Syntyche.

If you want to be great.

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,

then make my joy complete,

by being like-minded,

having the same love,

being one in spirit and purpose.

If you want to be great,

empty it out, throw it over.

Do nothing out of your selfish ambition

or your vain conceit,

but in humility,
consider others,
the phrase is 'better than yourselves'
consider others.

Let your selfish ambition and vain conceit go.

Throw it over.

It's the only way you will move forward.

It's what will keep you from sinking.

Paul speaks very specifically,

to this perfect, well, near perfect, church.

He speaks to what keeps them from being fully great.

When Paul says,

consider others, 'better than yourselves'.

We immediately react.

What about me!

'we're all equal.'

The defensiveness shows something about us.

We are keen to have ourselves considered.

Look at me.

Look at what I'm doing.

Think about what I have to go through.

We aren't that keen to consider others.

To ask, 'what is it like to be you today?'

I read the story about a father of three

who brought his boss home for dinner.

He told all his boys to be on their best behaviour.

And they were.

They spoke only when spoken to and were as polite as could be,

even the youngest one.

The boss was one of those blustery, braggart,

pompous kind of people who loved to talk about himself.

No matter what the conversation,

he turned the topic back to himself.

Over and over again he talked about being a self-made man.

About half way through the meal,
the boss noticed the youngest boy staring at him
with a puzzled look on his face.
His curiosity got the better of him,
and he asked,
'What's the matter boy,
something troubling you?'

'Yes sir,' said the boy,
'I don't mean any disrespect sir.
But you said you were a self-made man?'

To which the boss replied,
'That's right son and darned proud of it too.'
The boy cocked his head a little and then said,
'well, sir, if you're self-made and all that,
then why'd you make yourself like that?'

If you are full of yourself, you are more likely to sink.
And it isn't just the proud and blustery who can be full of themselves.

The insecure can be full of themselves too.

Am I doing okay?

Did I say the right thing?

What are others thinking of me now?

What's the point if they won't listen anyway?

The anxious can be full of themselves.

What if it doesn't turn out?

What about next month?

How am I going to manage?

Our selfish ambition and vain conceit will spring a leak every time.

They will keep us from being fully great.

How do you keep from sinking?

Not just at church,

but in your marriage,

in your friendships,

with your kids,

with your parents,

with your neighbour,

with your co-worker,
with the person who has hurt you,
with the person who is full of themselves

Listen to Paul.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition,

or vain conceit,

but consider others.

Look to the interests of others.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus,

‘Who being in very nature God,

did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,

but emptied himself.

He emptied himself,

holding onto only his nature as a servant.

Jesus knew who he was as God’s child and so

didn’t get caught into the trap of having to prove himself,

or protect himself,

or show himself,
or defend himself.

Jesus served,
in true humility,
in a manner which was a full outgrowth,
of who and what he was and is and will continue to be.

John Ortberg makes a brilliant and what I believe,
a faith-changing,
faith-maturing point like no other I've heard about this passage.

It's in the phrase that is translated,
taking the very nature of a servant.
Typically when we read this,
we think of Jesus reaching for his butler suit.

In fact in a passage in the gospel of John,
when Jesus ties the towel around his waist,
preparing to wash the disciples feet,
that sounds exactly like what he is doing,

putting on the butler suit.

We know all about the butler suit.

It's made of burlap

and it is itchy, and scratches

and is uncomfortable every time we wear it

in those places we are truly serving others

and getting nothing out of it for ourselves.

So we have this image of Jesus putting on the butler suit,

to bend down and wash his disciples feet.

And we think,

what a noble and humble guy.

That's great!

Look at him sucking it up and doing it.

He doesn't have to.

After all, he's the Son of God, Jesus.

But he's willing to stoop down

and wash the disciples feet.

He does it anyway.

What Ortberg points out,
that is so significant,
and so different to how we usually think about Jesus serving,
comes in this translation of Philippians 2.

Without turning this into a New Testament Greek class,
let me just say for you,
that it hinges in the word, being.
Being in very nature God.

It can be understood in two ways,
and depending on the translation
you'll hear it in different ways.

One goes like this,
despite the fact that he is in his very nature God,
he put on the scratchy butler uniform.
He took on the nature of a servant.

I heard it this way for many years.

Despite the fact that he could have had glory,

Jesus took on becoming a servant.

But the other perfectly valid way to translate this,
and this stunned me the first time I heard it,
stunned me with joy, and challenge, and an entire reworking,
of my picture of Jesus,

Who being in very nature God,
Because it is the nature of God,
he took up the nature of the servant.

It is the nature of God to serve.

He put off everything else,
but kept on his nature of a servant.

Jesus serves.

Want to know how you are doing in your desire to become more like
Christ?

Pay attention what is coming out of your heart and mouth
those times you are actually serving.

Then remember, it is the nature of God to serve.

Who being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
but emptied himself,
taking and keeping the very nature of a servant,
he laid himself down.

THAT is the character and nature of God.

That is where full greatness, complete greatness is found.

Jesus is great,

to serve, to give, to share, to love, to forgive, to restore,

to wash,

us.

Our feet.

James and John were two disciples

who out maneuvered the other disciples

in an attempt to get closest to the throne

they expected Jesus might one day take.

All the disciples had been arguing about who was the greatest.

It was a regular topic of conversation.

James and John were the ones who took action.

In a brilliant move from the playbook of the kindergarten playground, they got their mom and she asked Jesus.

Kneeling down she asked a favour of Jesus.

Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.'

You don't know what you are asking Jesus said.

You don't know what it is that makes one great.

When the other disciples heard about the tactical move of James and John they were indignant.

They had been jostling for position themselves.

They hadn't thought to ask their mothers for help.

Jesus called the disciples together and said,

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.

Not so with you.

Instead, whoever wants to become great among you

whoever wants to be great,
must be your servant,
and whoever wants to be first
must be your slave.

Just as the Son of Man

did not come to be served, but to serve,
and to give his life as a ransom for many.'

There is where you find greatness.

There is where you see lordship.

This is where Jesus takes up and owns the title, Lord.

He emptied himself.

He served.

He became a slave, owned, by the mission to serve others.

He told his disciples,

you call me teacher and Lord,

rightly so.

Now, a student isn't above her teacher,

a servant isn't above his master,

so here is what I'm telling you to do.

Follow the example I gave you.

Follow your Lord.

The path to greatness in the kingdom is service.

You don't need to go to Africa to do this.

Africans don't need to come to Canada in the winter to do this.

You can practice the greatness of the kingdom in serving your spouse,
rather than positioning yourself for something more.

You can practice the greatness of the kingdom in serving your parents,
or your children, your sibling, your coworker, your neighbour,
your church family.

And if you are getting good at it,

then take your serving skills to the community, to the world.

Be like God in your very nature.

Empty yourself, throw over selfish ambition and vain conceit.

Humbly serve the other ahead of yourself.

It is the character of the Lord.

It is what makes him great.

It is what makes him Lord.

The danger and risk of selfish ambition,

what I want,

out of my job, my relationship, my money,

the danger of vain conceit,

I know what's best,

for me, for you, for this situation,

for that situation.

The danger and risk, of making someone, or something

other than Jesus, your Lord,

Your ruler, your guide, your boss.

Is it will sink your faith.

Paul pleads in this letter

to the church and people he holds dear,

to keep seeking greatness,

to keep following the Lord.

He says,

‘Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,
for it is God who works in you to will and to act
in order to fulfil his good purpose.

Continue to work out your salvation.

Empty yourself,

throw the selfish ambition and vain conceit overboard.

Look to the interests of others.

Empty yourself to be left with the nature of God,

which is to serve.

which is greatness in the kingdom of heaven.

God exalted Jesus to the highest place

and gave him the name that is above every name,

that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,

in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

and every tongue acknowledge

that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Amen.