

## *Palm Sunday*

April 5, 2009

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Philippians 2:5-11

***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 made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him 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 confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (NIV)***

***“In humility consider others better than yourselves.”*** These words of encouragement come before the words of our text this morning. Over the last week or so I have been trying to keep my eye out for examples of such humility. More often than not however I noticed just the opposite. I watch a basketball player make a great play and then see him pound his chest or point to the name on the back of his jersey. I try to get into a lane of traffic and many people would rather speed up and cut me off than let me get in ahead of them. As I observe this world I find a lot of self promoting, self serving, and selfishness. But if I look carefully I see this not only in the world, but in myself. I don't always consider others better than myself, or put other people's wants and needs above my own. It is very easy to fall into an attitude where I feel I am doing more than my share and to think that somehow I am better than others. As I look all around what I find is lots of pride and arrogance.

Don't get me wrong, that's not all that I observed. I saw the occasional basketball player credit his teammates for the great game. A couple of times this last week a car let me in or a person held open the door. I saw people humbly serve others, and I pray at times this week I put the interests of others above my own by serving and loving them more than myself.

Yes, I also witnessed acts of humility this week. But our humility only goes so far, doesn't it? We wouldn't give the other players all the credit, would we? We might let one or two cars in or hold the door for a couple people, but that's probably where it will stop. We may do some things for other people, but we are also very good and making sure number one is looked after as well. We will only go so far. We will only humble ourselves so much. And we continue to fall far short of the perfect example set for us. As we listen to the Word and set before our eyes the example of our humble Savior this morning, let's ask this question: **How could someone stoop so low?**

Has anyone ever stooped lower than Jesus? Has anyone ever put other people's interests above their own more than Jesus? Has anyone ever been as humble as Jesus? Paul is setting the bar pretty high when he writes ***“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.”*** Then with words jam packed with doctrinal truths Paul explains the depth of Jesus' humiliation. We stand in awe at how low Jesus would go, He ***“who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,***

***but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”***

Jesus is God. Jesus always was God and always will be God. But Jesus became a human being just like the rest of us. He took on weak flesh. Jesus made himself nothing. Literally He emptied himself. For a time Jesus did not take up the full and constant use of His true power and glory as God. He set it all aside and instead took on the form of a servant. When Jesus at certain times used His power and showed His glory as true God, He always did it for others. He put others ahead of himself - always. The One who walked on water and raised the dead did not seek fame or fortune or power for himself. He came to serve. Jesus stooped so low that He lovingly touched and healed the sick & the deformed. Jesus stooped so low that He ate & drank with the outcasts of society. Jesus stooped so low that He washed the dirty feet of his own disciples.

But we know Jesus stooped even lower! Paul writes: ***“And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!”*** That’s how low Jesus was willing to go! You can almost imagine the apostle Paul gasping as He says this. ***Jesus humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross!*** For to be put on a cross was a punishment reserved for the worst of criminals and slaves. Old Testament Israelites would sometimes hang a dead body on a tree to make a point of letting everyone know that this person had been cut off from God. They were under a curse for their unbelief and rebellion and sin against the Lord. Indeed, cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.

It could not get any lower than that, yet that is how low the Son of God stooped. He was hung on a tree. He was cursed. He was punished and killed. But it was not for his unbelief. It was not for his rebellion. It was not for his sin. It was for ours. It was for the world’s unbelief, rebellion & sin. Jesus was hung on a tree and cut off from God for all of our self promotion and our self serving and our selfishness. Jesus stooped so low to save you and me. He made Himself so small because His love for us was so great. Next time we say or sing the Apostles’ Creed together think about what we are saying. Think about how much Jesus, true God, humbled Himself as He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

It’s really not surprising then on this Palm Sunday to see how Jesus rides into Jerusalem to die, is it? It’s not out of His character to see our King riding on a lowly donkey. ***“See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Zechariah 9).*** Our King came to bring salvation not by His might & power, but by for a time setting all His might and power aside. He came not to crush His enemies with His all powerful arms, but to stretch out His arms & lay down His life for His enemies. Jesus came to Jerusalem not to be covered in majestic robes and to wear a jeweled crown, but to be stripped and beaten and have placed on his head a crown of thorns. How could someone stoop so low? Only amazing love for us moved Jesus to stoop so low. It was Jesus’ love to save sinners. That’s the only reason Jesus emptied Himself and endured the cross. Jesus humbled Himself to secure for us salvation.

Now we might ask anyone who knows the love of Jesus: how can someone not stoop so low? With Jesus’ humility not only our example, but also our righteousness and source of strength, how can we not think of others as better than ourselves? How can we

do anything but acknowledge Jesus whose name is above every name? How can we not confess by our words and with our actions that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father? How can we do anything but serve Jesus who is risen from death and exalted to the highest place? How can we not love until the day when all will bow before our King? When we know just how low Jesus stooped to save us, how can we not be willing to stoop low to serve others?

In just the last few days here at Amazing Grace that it was I have observed once again. I've seen people in humility serve by cleaning the floors, wood, windows, carpets and bathrooms to get God's house ready to celebrate Easter. People even stooped low enough yesterday to dig into mulch and dirt. People here have stooped down to make sure little children and toddlers hear the message about our Savior from sin. People here have put other people's needs even above their own. Why would someone stoop so low? Only to serve our King of kings and Lord of lords, only to thank the Lamb who was slain but now sits on His throne & deserves all honor and glory and praise now and forever, only because Jesus' love compels us to live for Him who died for us and was raised again.

Jesus teaches us how to live not only with Him but with each other. Just think of how many problems will go away and how much strife just disappears if we always put the interests of others above our own and when listen to these words of our God: ***“In humility consider others better than yourselves.”*** It is something Jesus teaches us to do. It is something Jesus gives us the strength to do. It is something Jesus has done already for us and for our salvation! Amen.

