

- 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. (Philippians 2:5-11)

Are You Riding with Jesus?

Well, what did you think of our little reenactment of Palm Sunday today? Did you enjoy it? Was it worthwhile? We spent some time practicing it with the school children this week because we wanted to make it work as well as possible. One of the teachers pointed out that it was very much like Jesus' Triumphal Entry in at least one way: it was messy. Jesus' ride into Jerusalem was not choreographed. Everybody didn't march in formation. People didn't even all show up at the same time. The crowd gathered and others came running asking what was happening. It was a messy, real event. And I think that we did successfully recreate that part of Jesus' entry this morning. The truth is, we did a procession on Palm Sunday in my last congregation for several years and I was never completely happy with how it has gone. So why do I kept doing it? To put us there with Jesus on the first Palm Sunday. Not in the sense of teaching us what it would've been like to participate on that day. We didn't come close to a historical reenactment. Rather, to put us there with Jesus as a confession of our faith in the Savior who rode into Jerusalem on Sunday and died on Friday and rose again the Sunday after. Whether you chose to walk and carry a palm branch today or not, I hope that you confess that faith. My friends, **are you riding with Jesus?**

I.

St. Paul says, **“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 ...”** Jesus is God. He's God's only begotten Son and that means that he is fully and completely God. He is equal to his Father in every way. But Jesus wasn't caught up in his position. He was humble in heart. So Jesus did something amazing. Paul says he **“made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”** What's Paul talking about? Very simply, he's talking about Christmas. He's taking us back to December and reminding us what really happened then: God made himself man in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

For the Son of God, that was a real step down. He took the nature of a servant. That's Paul's description of being human. We're servants. How does that grab you? I went to a job website and I couldn't find any job entitled “servant.” We don't like that word. We don't want to be anybody's servants because that would be a low lot in life. That's not what we want. But God's definition of being human is to be a servant. He created us to serve him in love and humility. He created us to rejoice in serving him. The truth is, we would be happiest if we could do that perfectly.

Jesus made himself a servant. Even more, Paul said that Jesus “made himself nothing.” The Greek says that he emptied himself. When Jesus became one of us, he set aside the full use of his power and glory as God. Now he always had it – you see it every time he did a miracle. But while he lived here, he didn't use it all the time. He lived like we have to live. The truth is, he lived a much more humble existence than most of us have

ever known. Jesus did not live in the United States of America where all men are created equal. He lived in a backwater province of the Roman Empire. He lived in a world in which the little guy was really little. He grew up in a poor family. When he became an adult, he had no money, no home, none of the things that you and I expect to see when we unlock our doors after church today. Even though he was the most popular and exciting preacher of his day, the establishment had nothing but scorn for him. On Palm Sunday when he marched into Jerusalem as the King returning to his people, the only honor guard he had was a bunch of fishermen. The reception committee from the religious and political leaders asked him to tell his disciples to stop cheering for him. Jesus, the Son of God, came down here and he made himself nothing.

Paul says, **“He humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!”** Now, obviously dying on a cross is bad. But if someone was going to nail you to a cross, would you worry most about the humiliation of it all? Wouldn't most of us fixate on the pain? On the nails biting our flesh? On hanging there for hours, tortured by thirst while our lungs filled up with fluid and we died of suffocation? I think that's what we'd be most worked up about. But the Bible hardly mentions the pain of the cross. It stresses the humiliation. You see, the Romans only crucified slaves and traitors. The death itself called those people scum. In the Old Testament, God said that hanging someone on a tree symbolized God rejecting them and sending them to hell. Jesus didn't die a glorious death. He didn't fall as a great hero in battle. He died like a slave. He died like an unbeliever, rejected by God and thrown out of heaven.

He did that all willingly. That's the attitude of humility that Paul calls all of us to have. Do we? How do you react when someone puts you down? Do you ever feel your ears burn with shame and embarrassment? We all have a sense of dignity that we want to protect. How low would you be willing to go for someone else? How much of your personal dignity would you be willing to sacrifice? This past week, the governor of New York had to resign because of a sex scandal. When the scandal broke, he went on television with his wife by his side. Think about how humiliating that must have been for her. Yet, she went on television and stood by her husband. How much humiliation would you be willing to suffer for your family or your spouse? How much snickering and laughing behind your back? How much gossip and abuse?

Pride is one of our greatest weaknesses. In America, that weakness is heightened because our society believes that pride is a good thing. Public schools tell kids to have pride in themselves. Coaches and TV programs all promote pride. Our society tells us that you are the most important person in the world. But the Bible always calls pride a sin. Jesus had no pride. He was willing to sacrifice everything. But pride haunts us. We are so far from Jesus' attitude that we deserve nothing but death and hell.

But the story of Palm Sunday is about more than an example. Jesus emptied himself and lived a life of sorrow and hardship to pay for our sinful pride. Jesus made himself a servant so that he could take our place in death and in hell. Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, knowing that the cheers were false, knowing that by Friday, the crowds would replace “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” with “Crucify him! Crucify him!” Jesus came that day to die for you and for me. In that death, he paid for all our sinful pride. He paid for everything that we are guilty of.

God showed that it was all paid for when he exalted Jesus. Jesus didn't have to reclaim his rightful position. He didn't have to rehabilitate his image or convince people to accept him again. God the Father exalted Jesus. Paul says, **“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.”** When did all that happen? Well, it began on Easter Sunday. Jesus rose from the dead. Already then, God was telling us that Jesus was successful in winning eternal life for us. God continued that exaltation in his ascension and now, Jesus is seated at the right hand of God. Right now, the church gives glory to Jesus. We praise him and proclaim him as Lord and Savior.

But every tongue does not yet confess Jesus. Every knee does not yet bow to him. That has to wait for Judgment Day. When that day comes, everyone in heaven and on earth and even everyone in hell will acknowledge that Jesus is God and Savior. They will all bow to him and praise for dying and rising and winning eternal life for us. Of course, for the devil and his angels and for all those who refused to believe the gospel message, that confession will be forced. It will be a taste of their humiliation – of their hell. But for us, that confession will be nothing but joy because at last we will see what Jesus won for us. We will have the

glory that Jesus rode into Jerusalem to give us. Our sins will be gone and our hearts will be pure and we will praise Jesus forever.

Today is Palm Sunday. Today we reenact what Jesus did two thousand years ago and we pre-enact what Jesus will do on the last day. Our procession was an attempt to remind us that we are there with Jesus when we trust what he did for us. My friends, **are you riding with Jesus? His ride saved us from what we are.**

II.

Jesus did all that for us. That brings us back to the beginning of Paul's words to us this morning. **"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."** Only when we have understood God's love for us can we begin to love God or our fellow man. Only when we see Jesus riding into Jerusalem to die and take our sins away, only when we trust that Jesus died and rose and we are now free – only then can we look at Jesus as the example of true humility God calls us to follow.

He is that example. Jesus teaches us what love is really like: love is humble. Love always puts the needs of the one I love first. That's what Jesus did. He didn't think about his position. He didn't think about the honor or glory that was due him. He thought about us and what we need and he emptied himself and made himself a servant so that we will live. Love sacrifices oneself for the needs of others – without even thinking about whether they will love me back.

That's the attitude Paul tells us to have: love that humbles itself for others. First of all, we humble ourselves before God. That is what Jesus did. The Son of God did all that "to the glory of God the Father." It was the Father's plan to save us. Jesus didn't say, "Then you go and die on cross!" He willingly came and died for us. He gives all the glory to his Father. Every time we show love that comes from faith, we, too, are giving glory to God because he calls us to show that kind of humble love. Every time we serve God because we trust the God who loved us so much that he sent his Son to die for us, then we are being like Jesus.

That attitude reaches out in love to the people around us. How do you treat your spouse? How do you treat your children? What priorities does your family have? The most important thing you can do for your family is bring them here so that they know the love of Jesus. The most important way that you can love the people around you is by making the word of God the center of your life so that you can live as Jesus lived. That's what God calls us to do.

Love never worries about what people will think of me. Will they think I'm a religious fanatic? Will I look foolish? Love doesn't ask that question. One of the best examples of humble love is the love of a mother for a baby. Changing diapers is dirty, smelly work. But moms who love their babies don't hesitate to do it – even if they just did it an hour ago, because they know the baby needs it. They may not enjoy the process, but they humble themselves and do that dirty work out of love.

God calls all of us to love like that. When we set aside our pride and serve one another, then we are serving our Lord. We are bowing our knees before Jesus and confessing him as Lord. We are riding into Jerusalem with him because his love and his sacrifice for us changes our attitude. Now, will we be perfect in that? No. We will struggle to be humble in this world because our hearts are sinful. But God is working through the gospel. He creates in us the power and the desire to love by showing us the love Jesus lavished on us. He calls us to commit ourselves to living that love. The commitment begins with our attitude. It begins when we come to God in faith and we change the way we look at life. It begins when we consider humility and faith to be our greatest virtues. That's the attitude Jesus had when he entered Jerusalem that day. **Are you riding with Jesus? His ride teaches us what to be.**

I don't know if you liked the procession with palms this morning or not. If I can't figure out how to make it work, I'll eventually just give up and do something else for this great festival. But however we celebrate this day, ride with Jesus. Trust him as your Savior. And humble yourself to serve him. Amen.