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Philippians Series #2

***Imitating Christ
Philippians 2:1-15***

Last week I had you ***listen*** to the first chapter of Philippians, because this is a letter from Paul that would have been read aloud to the Philippians church. So this week I invite you to ***listen again*** to this letter from Paul, Philippians 2:1-15:

*If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy,
2 make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.
3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.
4 Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.
5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,
7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form,
8 he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross.
9 Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,
10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. 12 Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;
13 for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. 14 Do all things without murmuring and arguing,*

15 so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world.

These are some **beautiful and powerful** words about what we are called to do as Christians, and as the church.

5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus
What does that **mean to you**?

When I hear that I wonder—
What if that's the **whole point** of our Christian journey?
Is that why we are here, in this church family?

To be like Christ?

Sure seems like that's what Paul is saying here.

Why are we here? **To be like Christ.**

It reminds me of the reader's digest version of something Ghandi said, which was that we should **be the change we want to see in the world.**

Isn't that kind of what Paul is saying?

We are to **be like Christ,**

because Jesus is who we want to see around us!

If we want to see Jesus even more,

We can get up and start acting like Him!

If you read a lot of Paul's writings,
I think you'd find that there's no excuse for just sitting in a church—
we are called to actually **be** Christ to one another!

How are we being Christ?

How are we being Christ, as a **church**?

Sounds like being Christ would be a given, but

Isn't it actually a little counter-cultural?

This isn't exactly what we put out on our outdoor church **signs**, is it?

Come and **be like Christ.**

I don't know if we'd get many visitors, to be honest.

So many people are looking for a place where they can **be** anonymous
(good luck with that here),

or **be** a spectator, instead of a player on the team called church.

And lots of us may wonder,
 isn't Jesus supposed to *be doing something for me?*
 Aren't we here to let *him fill us up?*
 Well, maybe yes and no.

What does *being Christ* mean?
 Is this just something else we have to *DO*?
 I really don't think God just wants to give us a longer to do list!

I think if you asked 50 Christians *how can you be like Christ*,
 you'd get *50 different answers*.
 Some might say follow *rules*: the commandments, the Great Commandment.
 Others might say come to church, *look and act* your best—
 tithe, serve, be kind.
 Others might say *be holy*, and keep out everything and everyone who is not.

But what does *God say* about being Christ?
 (Always a good idea to ask God these questions when we turn to the Bible!, I
 do it many times a week as I ask God to speak to and through me!)

Philippians 2 is possibly the best answer to that question.
 And Paul says it's more than a worthy goal—he says to *be Christ means life!*

Listen again to some verses in Philippians 2:
Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as
something to be exploited,
7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
8 he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death
on a cross.

But I keep coming back to verse 5:
Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.
 What does it mean to have the *mind of Christ*?
 What *was Jesus' mind*, his way of being, and living, his attitude?
 How would we sum it up in one word?
 What about *HUMILITY*?

Ooh, that's **hard for us** human beings, isn't it?
 Humility is a **complicated** thing, right?
 It's pretty **elusive**, not something you wake up and say—
 today I'm going to be humble!
 Just when you **think you're humble**, you're probably not!

And Paul describes humility in a very interesting way:
 He says it's an **emptying, a giving up, a surrender and sacrifice**.

So, having the mind of Christ—the humility of Christ—
 would mean **giving up our self-centered** lives.

Hmm.

If we're honest, this is us—right?

We tend to focus on us first, everyone else next, don't we?

And our world tells us this is ok, that this is the way life should be—you
 deserve this, you want this, you need this, you are made for this!

You are #1.

So how **do we empty ourselves** of the desire to be #1?

How do we give up what we want, when we want it?

(which for most of us is RIGHT NOW!)

How do we give up our feelings of pride and arrogance?

How do we sacrifice our interests and put others first?

What would Jesus do?

What about **first turning our hearts and lives to God**,
 and the people around us, **instead of ourselves?**

Does this mean we **give up thinking of ourselves?**

Do we allow others to dictate who we are, and what we do?

Well, I don't think that humility means be a **doormat**.

That wasn't Jesus—he wasn't a doormat.

He was powerful in his life and death.

He was following his Father God, just as we are to follow Him.

In fact, in Romans 12:3 Paul says

"For by the grace given me I say to every one of you:

Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.”

In other words, humility is **knowing who you are, and who you are not**.

It reminds me of the great saying:

*Humility does not mean thinking less of yourself, but **thinking of yourself less**.*

Thinking of yourself less.

What if we could do that—with God’s help?

Not that it’s easy, but what if God could lead us down that path?

The path of self-emptying, just like what Jesus did for us.

If you think about it, **humility is powerful** in many ways, isn’t it?

Humility leads to restored and new **relationships**.

It leads to a **greater faith and attitude** about life.

It leads to a greater **community**, based on unity and peace.

Just imagine if all of us were able to empty our selfish desires, and put one another first!

What would this **church** be like?

What would the **world** be like?

What would happen if every human being was treated **like a child of God**, made in the image of God?

Can you imagine it?

What if **we didn’t need** to have our **own way**?

What if we didn’t need to be **right**?

What would it look like if we all **wanted to live for each other**, just like Christ lived for us?

When I think about this possibility,

I think of how much more **encouragement** there would be,

how much more **hope**,

so much **more peace**,

and respect for all people.

I think there would be more **forgiveness and grace**,

It would certainly lead to so much **gratitude**!

You know, there’s a great translation of today’s verses in Eugene Peterson’s **The Message Bible**. Listen to this:

If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care -

2 *then do me a favor: **Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited** friends.*

3 *Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and **help others get ahead**.*

4 *Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. **Forget yourselves** long enough to lend a helping hand.*

5 *Think of yourselves **the way Christ Jesus thought of himself**.*

6 *He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what.*

7 *Not at all. When the time came, **he set aside the privileges** of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human!*

8 *Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly **humbling** process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death - and the worst kind of death at that: a crucifixion.*

Can you imagine—**Jesus gave up the privileges** that came with being God!
Can you even imagine if **famous people** gave up their special privileges?
What if we gave up **ours**?

Humility is about **coming down** from our high place,
To be on the same level as others--out of love,
the way a parent comes down to a child's level, out of love.

Do you listen to **TED talks**?

I was listening to **Pope Francis'** talk from April this year.

It was excellent, all about how we **need** one another,
how we are **connected** to one another.

And how the '**other**' in our lives, is a person, with a face, and a story.

He spoke about **humility with a beautiful image**—
of a parent talking like the child,

you know that sing song talk you do with little ones...
and coming down to their level, all out of love.

No one says a booming WELCOME TO THE WORLD to a new baby,
you talk to them in that little baby, little kid voice, right?

The Pope reminded us that ***God came down to our level in Jesus.***

Jesus showed us humility, and how ***humility is a part of love.***

He quoted ***Mother Teresa***, who said,

“One cannot love unless it is at their own expense”.

Wow. That’s amazing, isn’t it?

Pope Francis reminded us all that we have a ***responsibility to be humble***,
“the more your actions will have an impact on people, the more responsible you are to act humbly. If you don’t, your power will ruin you...you will end up hurting yourself and those around you, if you don’t connect your power with
humility and tenderness. *Through humility and love, on the other hand,*
power – the highest, the strongest one – becomes a service, a force for good.”

Pope Francis, ["Why The Only Future Worth Building Includes Everyone."](#) TED Talk (April 2017)

Humility is that kind of ***giving up, emptying, coming down.***

It’s also about ***obedience***—just like Jesus obeyed all the way to his death, are we willing to obey?

Jesus made the ultimate ***sacrifice***—

what sacrifices are we willing to make?

Sometimes just ***coming to church*** regularly is a sacrifice that we have to make, because we could be doing so many other things on a Sunday morning—(well maybe you guys could, not so much me)

So at this point you might be wondering,

if humility is all about ***giving up and emptying*** ourselves...

what do we get to ***keep***?

Good question.

I think the answer is we get ***life—real life—abundant life*** as Jesus called it.

We get our ***faith***,

and it’s a growing faith, when we are able to empty ourselves like Christ.

Think about it, as Jesus gave up so much,

what he kept became all the more powerful!

Kind of like when you ***give generously***,

God just gives to you in unexpected and amazing ways!

You know, the fact that ***Jesus suffered in his self-emptying***, says something to us today.

We are not going to always have it easy.

Sometimes it's just the opposite, or it feels that way at least.
We are going to suffer, we are going to have pain and trials and tribulations.
 We ***can't change*** that.

What can we change?
 Our ***attitude***.
 And our ***mind***.

We can ***seek the mind*** of Christ,
 who saw even in his pain, the life and love and hope of God.
 We can seek the mind of Christ,
 whose death on the cross brought grace to us.
 When ***Jesus emptied*** himself, we gained new and eternal life!
 When we ***empty ourselves***, we gain the ***power*** that God gave Jesus,
 to live as a new person in Christ.
 As the Pope said, when we are humble, ***we are a force for good!***

And we certainly don't have empty ourselves on our own.
 We can ***call upon the power of the Holy Spirit***—
 our Counselor, Advocate, Encourager.

Because seeking the mind of Christ ***doesn't come naturally*** to us,
 especially privileged Americans like us.
 We want our rights, our opinions.
 We want our way, and we want it now.

But when ***someone acts like Christ*** to us, we ***want to know them***, right?
 we want what they have.
 When ***we act like Christ*** to someone else,
 they want to know us, and the power of God in our lives.
 Which is an incredible opportunity—for us the church!

I want to close with a poem you may know,
 the words of ***St. Teresa of Avila***, a 16th century nun:

*Christ has no body but yours, no hands, no feet on earth but yours.
 Yours are the eyes with which he looks, compassion on this world.
 Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good.
 Yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world.*

*Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, Yours are the eyes, You are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours...*

By the power of the Holy Spirit inside of us,
May we ***seek to be Christ***, for one another, and our world.
So that at the name of Jesus,
every knee should bend, and every tongue confess that He is Lord.
That's our ***Good News of the Gospel!***
And all God's people said, Amen.