



April 2015 Message for Congregations and Lay and Rostered Leaders

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ –

I thank my God every time I remember you... (Philippians 1:3).

This year I am inviting you to reflect on portions of Paul's letter, *to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi (1:1b)*, as you gather for church council, adult study, youth group, coffee group and are engaged in learning, discernment and reflection together. Relying heavily on the writings of Fred Craddock and of David Lose, each article will include a brief reflection on a Scripture passage, questions for reflection and discussion, and a prayer. I encourage you, as we begin, to read Paul's letter in its entirety in one sitting; remembering as you read that this is a letter – of Paul – to a church.

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*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who,
though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.
Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth
and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.
Philippians 2:5-11*

Seeking to describe for the Philippians the mind or spirit or wisdom of Christ that they should imitate, Paul employs the strategy of a wise pastoral leader: he invites them to consider their own words. This

passage about Jesus was most likely a hymn, you see, a hymn that the Philippians had probably sung in their worship on numerous occasions. Now, knowing of their struggles, of their hardship, or the threats both external and internal that they faced, Paul invites them to sing that hymn again, this time taking most seriously what it says about Jesus and, in this way, how they might draw encouragement from it.

Much can – and has! – been said about this “Christ hymn,” but here I draw your attention briefly to the contrast of the “original form” of Jesus and his “chosen form.” Though “in the form of God” he did not shield himself from difficulty; he did not request the privilege of his station; he did not exalt himself or exploit his status in any way. Rather, he chose to be found “in human form,” subject to all that afflicts humankind; all, that is, that afflicts us.

This is Paul’s understanding of the “incarnation” – God’s willing choice to take on our lot and our life in Jesus so that God might identify with us wholly and completely. There is nothing, that is, that we experience – no fear, no joy, no sorrow, no pain, no disappointment, no hope, no betrayal, no dream, no failure – that God has not also experienced. God knows us fully and completely through Jesus, the Son of God who chose not to be exalted but rather to live our life, even to the point of death.

And not just any death – in the one line scholars believe Paul added to the familiar hymn – but the humiliating death of being executed as a criminal on a cross.

Why? So that we might know God’s profound love for us; God’s desire to be in complete solidarity with us; and God’s commitment to be always for us. Thanks be to God. Alleluia!

Read and Reflect: Philippians 2:5-11

Discuss and Reflect:

What in this reading leads you to say, “I wonder about...”, or, “I noticed...”

Comment on the following: *This is Paul’s understanding of the “incarnation” – God’s willing choice to take on our lot and our life in Jesus so that God might identify with us wholly and completely.*

Comment on the following: *Why? So that we might know God’s profound love for us; God’s desire to be in complete solidarity with us; and God’s commitment to be always for us. Thanks be to God. Alleluia!*

Pray together: Gracious God, remind us always of your love for us; your solidarity with us; and your commitment to be always for us. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen (Philippians 4:23).

The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13).

In Christ Jesus –
Shalom,
+Larry

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