

Message for Stewardship Sunday, October 1, 2017

Glennon Heights Mennonite Church

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Scripture passage: Philippians 2:1-13

Make my joy complete

Giving is a part of our congregational DNA. It is part of our Christian DNA. On this Stewardship Sunday, we remind ourselves of this. And we celebrate giving: By introducing a new project for our children's offering, by commissioning and blessing new Conference leadership as they prepare to share their gifts, by looking forward to the coming year and thinking about how we will share our finances, talents and time to make our ministry possible.

We give of ourselves, our time, and our resources because we are followers of Jesus. How can we do otherwise and remain faithful? We follow the One who gave himself completely and without reserve for our sake and the sake of the world.

Our scripture passage this morning is from Paul's letter to the Philippians. Paul is writing to this new group of believers to encourage them in their life together, their new life "in Christ." Life "in Christ" is one of Paul's big themes. Following Jesus isn't something we add on to our lives, he says over and over. It's not like joining a club or cheering for a sports team. Instead it is a whole-life identity-changing type of thing. We follow Jesus Christ into God's presence and this totally transforms who we are and how we act.

In Paul's day in ancient Greece, humility was not regarded as a virtue. It was looked on as servility. In other words, only good for slaves or servants. Definitely not something any independent, self-respecting person would aspire to. Humility was for losers. This way of thinking hasn't changed much over the years. We might, as well-

trained Christians, say that humility is a virtue, but our culture and our behavior say otherwise. We have much in common with the folks at Philippi whom the Apostle Paul is addressing. Perhaps his message is as challenging for us as it was for them.

If you truly want your life to be “in Christ,” Paul says to them and to us, be humble. “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.” This is what it means to be Christlike.

“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.”

God did not just make a pronouncement from afar: “If you want to be my people, go forth and be humble.” Instead God acted. God gave us a living, breathing example of humility. In Jesus Christ God came to live among us. In Jesus Christ God, the Almighty, the Creator of the universe, took on human form. And in this human form God lived a life of humility and obedience, sharing our mundane joys and sorrows, even suffering pain, betrayal and death. God did this so that we, whom God loves, would be able to understand and identify fully with God’s true nature and purpose. In Jesus God did this – “he humbled himself, he emptied himself” – in order show us what faithfulness means. In order to show us what salvation means. In order to invite us to be Godlike, to live our lives with God “in Christ.”

And so, like God, we act. We gather in community. We become part of each

other's lives. We bring ourselves and our resources and offer them to each other and the world. We humble ourselves. We empty our pockets. We put our time, our money, our talents, our skills, our intellects on the table. In humility, knowing that we are "in Christ," we offer ourselves to each other and the world.

We have to work on this, yes, it is not easy, but never forget that being "in Christ" means having access to power and creativity beyond our imagining. "It is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for God's good pleasure." When we follow in Jesus' footsteps, when we turn our lives over to him, when we bind ourselves to his side, we enter Reality with a capital R. Reality that is bigger and more marvelous than we could have ever imagined. God's compassionate, merciful, life-giving Reality which encompasses, includes and saves us and the whole world.

Jesus Christ emptied and humbled himself. He was obedient even unto death. He was faithful to and through the end. "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."

Do we believe this? If so, let our convictions have legs, let our actions speak. Because what we do in our Christian community matters. We are called to relationships which are rooted in love. Relationships of selflessness and concern for others. Relationships steeped in humility. Being steeped in humility does not mean that we foster false modesty or a lack of self-esteem. Those are things that happen when we remain centered on the self. Instead we monitor our focus. We turn our attention outward, recognizing the rights and achievements of others. We look for ways to build

bridges between us, to meet needs and to strengthen the community as a whole. “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.”

If we can do this in our community of faith, we will be a powerful witness to what it means to be “in Christ.” What we believe is revealed in the way we behave. What we do is inevitably a proclamation to others of the gospel we believe. We don’t worship a God who remains far off, issuing orders and expecting us to fall in line in order to win God’s love. No, we worship God as revealed in Jesus Christ who came to live among us, who was willing to give up everything in order to make God and God’s great compassionate steadfast love known to us. This is what we take our cues from. This is the way we will act as believers and followers. This is how we will share the amazing love of God with each other and the world.

Sisters and brothers, never doubt that God is present and working among us. As you think about your resources and gifts – how much to share, what to offer, how to be involved – listen for the leading of the Holy Spirit. In humility and in trust, turn your focus outward. What is it that God requires of me, of us? What will build up our community? How can we respond to the needs around us? Where can I plug in? How will what we do here at Glennon Heights Mennonite Church proclaim the healing love of God to a broken and hurting world?

“If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete,” I say with the Apostle Paul. Remember always who and whose you are. Then putting selfish concerns aside, let us care well and generously for one another and the world.

In the highly exalted name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the name above all names.

Amen.