**Philippians 2:5-11** March 29, 2015

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Palm Sunday

*Philippians 2:5 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.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**The King Who Gave Up His Throne**

America is not big on kings and queens. Our country was formed by the rejection of that idea. We like our elections and freedom to make changes in our government. On the other hand kings and queens rule as long as they have life.

Sometimes, however, monarchs have handed over power before they die, this is called abdication. It didn’t happen much in the past. In the five hundred years of the Roman Empire, precisely one emperor, Diocletian, voluntarily abdicated. He abdicated at age 60 so that he could go back to his home town and take care of a vegetable garden. Sounds refreshingly humble, except that before abdicating he first built a luxurious palace next to the vegetable garden. So even if some monarchs hand over the reigns of power, they do not give up all the other benefits.

Palm Sunday is a Sunday when we see Jesus in a very un-democratic pose. The Gospel reading tells us, *“They brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’”* (Mark 11:7-9) It went for hours. When some complained that the people were making too much of a fuss, Jesus rebuked them and said that he deserved every bit of praise they gave him. Hmmm. Our democratic sensibilities might get offended here.

Our Epistle reading today keys off that praise. It says, ***“at the name of Jesus every knee should bow… and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.”*** It also says, ***“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.”***

So are we supposed to expect people to praise our every deed; just praise us for who we are? Are we supposed to expect people to see the goodness, no, the greatness in us and tell us what wonderful people we are? Is that what it means to have the mind of Christ? As Jesus accepted the Palm Sunday praise, so we should do? Of course, it is not. But these are precisely the sorts of attitudes we are encouraged to have by the world. The swagger and exaggerated sense of personal importance are counted as virtues. So is the ability to impose one’s will on others.

No, the kingly attitude of Jesus we are told to have is a little different.

**I. Jesus Gave Up His Throne For You**

A week ago I went to the Patton Museum with our visitors. I expected to find a museum dedicated to a man, but was surprised to find a museum more about an idea – in which the man figures prominently. The idea was leadership, and one big idea General Patton had about leadership was that a leader should know the lives of the people he leads. He would routinely visit the front lines. He ordered his general staff to do the same. And whether it is a General or a factory supervisor or high school teacher who does this, it is a solid leadership concept. We can respect someone who knows our day-to-day life. Even if a person is very rich or powerful, but we feel that they understand us, we generally do not resent their power or influence.

When we are told to have the attitude of Jesus Christ, we should think of a king like that. Paul’s three sentence biography of Jesus Christ begins by saying, ***“[Jesus]*** ***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”*** (6-7). The reading starts with Jesus before he was Jesus. It reminds us that the Christ is and was “in very nature God.” He is the immense, eternal, powerful, all-wise God. But then he somehow miraculously condensed himself down into a little tin can of humanity with the name Jesus on the side. I don’t know how he did it.

One thing is for certain, it was a step down. Imagine living in the Bill Gates mansion. Then move down a step to three-bedroom house like ours, then living in a two room apartment, then in a mini-van, then in a cardboard box. I mean, who would downgrade like that? You could perhaps move down a level, maybe even two – if you had to. But Jesus gave up a lot more than a 23-car garage and an in-home theater.

Jesus limited himself, not only in the space he had, but in so many other ways. By being human, he put aside his almightiness and accepted weakness – remember how he could not even lift he own cross but someone else had to do it for him. Remember the anxiety he felt in the Garden of Gethsemane – if he were just true God and nothing else, would he have felt any anxiety? He subjected himself to so many things: time, space, fatigue, pain, age, anxiety. That is not what we usually think of with kings, is it? Limiting oneself, even denying oneself? That’s not what kings are good at. So Jesus did kind of the opposite of most abdications. Usually a monarch gives up the repsonsibility while keeping the privileges. Here Jesus gives up the privileges and takes on even more responsibility.

But we’re not done here! The reading goes on, ***“And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!”*** (8). Not only did Jesus limit himself by being human, he became the servant of all people. In addition to being human, he accepted an entire new level of limitations. He suffered for us. He died for us. He woke every morning with us on his mind. We were his concern.

Through all that, the power of deity was always within arm’s reach. Jesus, at any point, could have reached over and grabbed that divine power. His humility and humiliation was his choice. Someone once said, “A person can only be [humble] if he humbles himself, not if he is [humble] by necessity” (From Witherington, Ben, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, on 2:8). That is why we hate a forced confession – because if it is forced it is not a true confession. That is why compliments that are asked for are worthless compared to those spontaneously given. That is why Jesus’ humility is so amazing: he did not have to be our servant; he chose to be.

The reporter had gone to India to see the lives of and interview some of the “untouchables”. Maybe you have heard of the caste system in India. In that cultural system, people are born into levels of society that can never change. (Now I will admit that this is an over-simplification.) The lowest level is the “untouchable” class. The “untouchables” are basically regarded as a pollutant by the rest of society. Higher levels don’t talk to them, don’t respect them, don’t buy things they sell. They are what their name says: untouchable. The reporter talked to one of these women. Her job, the job which she had performed since being a girl and would have to do for the rest of her life, was to empty chamber-pots—all day, every day. A smelly job that made her smelly. No hope of making any more money, of ever doing any other job. It was the job to which her daughter, who hated her for it, was born. The lowest of the low. No future. No future for her children. One of the most heart-rending interviews I have ever heard. Would you be willing to interview such a person? To help such a person? To live with such a person? To live like such a person? To become that person? ***“Jesus made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant…and became obedient ot death—even death on a cross!”*** What a precious gift that has been given by Jesus. How much he gave up to save us from our sins!

**II. He Gave Up His Throne To Teach You**

Considering Jesus’ willingness to humble himself and die for us, the Bible tells us, ***“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.”***

The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to believers in a town called Philippi. The church here seems to have been an almost ideal church. It is the one church that Paul wrote to without any words of rebuke. They were a great bunch of Christians who got along well. But Paul knew how easily discord rises. One insult, and a 20 year grudge gets started. So Paul wrote these words, these words that marvel at the humility of our king riding a donkey. He points at that king and tells us, “Look, you see that? That king who became one of us, that king who is riding to his death for us—you see that? *“If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love … then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love”* (Php 2:1-2).

Then he gets specific, *“In humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others”* (3-4). We are encouraged to change our thinking in two regards. First, we are to consider others better than ourselves. Secondly, we look after their interests as much as our own. Not only do we respect their person, but also their lives. We want them to succeed. We learn to be interested, not just in our own lives, but in the lives of others.

To what extent would you be willing to adopt the servant attitude of Christ Jesus? To be quite honest, I confess a difficulty. While in Africa, we may have lived a few years in the village, but we never lived even close to the level that most of the people. We were simply unable to do so. But we prayed then and now that in some way we were showing a bit of the love Jesus did.

To what extent would you be willing to adopt the servant attitude of Christ Jesus? Perhaps we are willing to visit or help some less privileged than ourselves. Some have gone much farther. I think here of foster parents who are willing to bring children from difficult families into their own families – and sometimes even adopt them as their own children. Not their own interests, but the interests of others.

To what extent would you be willing to adopt the servant attitude of Christ Jesus in regard to personal relationships. Have you been insulted? Have people gossipped? Forgive. Hold your tongue. Give up the grudge. Consider Jesus who was not only content to become one of us, but even to serve and die for us.

To what extent are you willing to adopt the servant attitude of Christ Jesus? You know what: we even need to adopt this thinking within our church. Are we willing to let sharp words drop to the ground like melting icicles? Are we willing to let personality differences be nothing more than that? Can we feel mutual respect and concern even with people who don’t see eye-to-eye with us?

This is not to say that any sort of wealth or position in this world is wrong. Look at Jesus’ ministry again and again, and you will find that Jesus never demanded that people give up the status or position that they had in society. What he did say was, “Use you status and position and wealth in service to your God and to people.” May God work in us to have the same attitude as our King who died for us.

I cannot legislate you to do any of what I have just said. It isn’t a rule book. What it is is a mindset guided by God’s Holy Spirit. ***“Your attitude should be the same as Christ Jesus.”*** Amen.