

## Palm Sunday 2017

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 2.5)

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Last week, the Gospel ended with the Lord Jesus saying, “Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be first among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.” (St. Matthew 20. 26-28)

“Whoever will be first, let them be a servant”. It fits with something else Jesus said: “The last shall be first, and the first, last”. And, of course, it fits with what He did in coming from Heaven to suffer and die for us. And, we hear this word again this morning from St. Paul; and the emphasis calls for our undivided attention: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be equal to God, but emptied Himself, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross”.

Martin Luther had some helpful things to say about this, especially with regards to the word “form” which Paul used. Paul said that although Jesus was in the form of God He emptied Himself and took on the form of a servant. Luther underlined the verb ‘being’ by interchanging it with ‘existing’: “Christ, *being* in the form of God”—“Christ *existing* in the form of God”. That helps us to see a contrast in what comes next: “*being* in the form of God, He emptied Himself and *took* the form of a servant”. “Christ took upon Himself the form of a servant, it is true,” wrote Luther “but in that form was no real servant....(That is) Christ disrobed Himself of the divine form wherein He existed, to assume that of a servant, which did not express His essential character....That means He took on the attitude and bearing of a servant in relation to others.”

Luther’s reason for getting so technical was to highlight the point that we must imitate Christ: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus”. You see, Luther saw many around him who were grasping for power. They were actually servants – mere humans – but they tried to position themselves for honour and success. They were not satisfied with what they had. They were filled with envy.

On the other hand, the Lord Jesus was God in both nature and character. He did not need to jockey for position or power. He “did not count equality with a God a thing to be grasped” because He was/is fully God. He is “of the same substance as the Father”. Given all of that, Luther wrote, “What a terrible judgement must come upon those who fail to imitate the example of Christ; who do not humble themselves below their neighbours and serve them”.

Yesterday at the Vestry’s Visioning Day, we had some simple, practical advice on how we may imitate the mind of Christ. Basically, if we are to try and imitate the Lord Jesus, we need to remember what He did: He emptied Himself and took on the form of a servant! He became one of us. As we say in the Creed, “For us and for our salvation, He came down from Heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man”.

This humble coming of our Lord; this Incarnation; this taking on the form of a servant, meant that He presented Himself face to face. Face to face – that was the advice! As members of Christ; as those who have been adopted as the children of God, we must pay attention to this simple truth – the personal, face to face approach. We tend to think that everything can be solved by programs. But God’s ‘program’ to provide us with hope, forgiveness and salvation was His Son, Who came to be with us face to face.

Some will say that this is too small of a thing to make any difference in the world. It is ridiculous! But wait is it? With all of our technology and busyness; with our attempts to be self-sufficient, instead of getting more connected with each other we are becoming less and less connected each year. Our society is dangerously individualistic. It has conditioned us to think as individuals rather than as families or communities. So, the ‘face to face’, personal, incarnational approach really makes sense, if the Church is going to imitate the mind of Christ. And there is nothing easy about that! Face to face means close and direct; it requires listening and compassion – suffering with the other.

The first step for us as ‘servants of God’ is to slow down. Let’s slow down and listen to what the Lord is saying. Let’s break with the busyness and be silent. Let us hear this word again how Christ “humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross”. What is our response to such Mercy? He did this for us, weak and selfish though we are. He did not send another with a

message. He did not send a fax or an email. He did not text us with His Love. He came Himself, in great humiliation and Blood, face to face, to help us.

During the last war, a church in Strasbourg, France, was destroyed. Nothing remained except a heap of rubble and broken glass, or so the people thought till they began clearing away the masonry. Then they found a statue of Christ still standing erect. In spite of all the bombing it was unharmed except that both hands were missing. Eventually rebuilding of the church began.

One day a sculptor saw the figure of Christ, and offered to carve new hands. The church officials met to consider the sculptor's friendly gesture—and decided not to accept the offer. Why? Because the members of that church said: "Our broken statue touches the spirits of men, but that He has no hands to minister to the needy or feed the hungry or enrich the poor—except our hands. He inspires. We perform."

It is true, albeit incredible. The Lord of Heaven and earth has chosen to use us in His plan of bringing hope and salvation to the world. And the work is to be done face to face. We are to imitate the mind of Christ and use a personal approach. The Holy Spirit Who dwells in us will help us. As the Church, we must get our heads around the fact that in this mission, we are to be the hands of Christ on earth. The following poem by Annie Johnston Flint says it all:

"Christ has no hands but our hands to do His work today  
He has no feet but our feet to lead men in the way  
He has no tongue but our tongue to tell men how He died  
He has no help but our help to bring them to His side.  
We are the only Bible the careless world will read,  
We are the sinner's gospel; we are the scoffer's creed;  
We are the Lord's last message, given in word and deed;  
What if the type is crooked? What if the print is blurred?  
What if our hands are busy with other work than His?"

What if our feet are walking where sin's allurements are?

What if our tongue is speaking of things His lips would spurn?

How can we hope to help Him or welcome His return?"

—Annie Johnston Flint

And now unto God Almighty: the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost....