

## **ADDRESS FOR PALM SUNDAY**

*(Philippians 2:6)*

**Let Us Pray:**

***Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.  
Amen.***

Text: Philippians 2:6

<sup>6</sup>Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped....'

Dear friends in Christ,

Have you ever wondered what motivated Paul to write: "*He did not consider equality with God something to be grasped*"? I ask this because even if I omit this phrase from verses 5-7 it still makes sense. It would read like this: "*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: who being in very nature God, ... made himself nothing, taking on the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.*" (v5-7)

But why is this phrase so important? Well, let me explain: when Paul writes to the Philippians he uses a form of the verb 'to grasp' which conveys the idea that, unlike others in the past, the person in question doesn't use his status to attain glory. And by using this verb Paul is pointing us to a special quality about Jesus.

So, let's hear this phrase again, but with a different emphasis: "*Christ did not consider equality with God something to be grasped*". You see, when the emphasis is moved to Christ it implies that someone – a long time ago – did consider equality with God something worthwhile seizing. A person who considered that being 'God-like' was profitable.

My friends, just cast your minds back to the Garden of Eden (Gen 3). There 'the father of lies', persuaded Adam and Eve that if they ate the forbidden fruit they would NOT surely die. For, Satan continues, "*God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*" (Gen. 3:4-5) So Adam and Eve reached out, 'grasped' the fruit, and ate. But actually, it wasn't the fruit they wanted – it was to be like God!!

On the other hand, Jesus, whom we confess in the Nicene Creed as ‘the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God’, did NOT try to hold on to what He had from eternity. In fact, He did quite the opposite: Jesus “*made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!*” (v7,8)

Now, **Adam** and **Jesus** were as different as you can get: Adam grasped, Jesus gave. Adam was disobedient, Jesus was obedient. Indeed, they were as different in life, as in death: whilst Adam deserved to die, Jesus didn’t; whilst Adam died as a penalty for his sin, Jesus died to atone for Adam’s sin. And not just Adam’s sin, but for my sin and yours.

But unlike Adam’s grab for glory, Jesus grasped our sin, our death, and our hell, in order to undo what Adam did in Eden. Jesus did this so we might have forgiveness and life in the midst of a world of sin and misery and death. Yes, in other words, “He humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!” for us – for me and you – who 2,000 years later are still grasping for equality with God.

Indeed, we still grasp for equality with God whenever we try to judge what is right or wrong based upon what we think, instead of what the Word of God teaches. When we want to be in control, instead of trusting God’s ways. Or, when we expect God to conform to our wants, instead of us submitting to His will.

So, then, how can we be more Christ-like? In a word: REPENTANCE. By humbling ourselves before God and admitting that ‘I am a poor, miserable grasper’ we receive from God what we could never hope to attain ourselves – that is, forgiveness of sins. Indeed, we must admit that if we are to be made right with God the solution cannot come from us. We must admit that only He who was perfect and obedient – who died for my sin, NOT His own – can put me right with God. And this is only possible by faith.

So, having been raised to new life with Christ in baptism we not only humble ourselves before God in repentance, but also lay down our lives serving others with our gifts and talents. Having ‘the mind of Christ’ means that we don’t live a life of grasping for greatness but imitate our Lord by forgiving those who have sinned against us, build up the weak (those who lack confidence), and the helpless (the marginalised).

My friends, on this Palm Sunday Jesus entered Jerusalem humbly, riding on a donkey. But in just a few days the Son of God humbly leaves Jerusalem, bound for Golgotha, where He is executed like a criminal – nailed to a cross – for me, for you and for the world.

In pre-coronavirus pandemic times, when the church gathered weekly, we would encounter our humble Saviour as He comes to us in Holy Communion. We would eat the bread and drink the wine that is His Body and Blood: which was sacrificed for our redemption and given up for the strengthening of our faith, and receive the resurrection-life which we need. Instead of grasping for equality with God, Jesus says now says: '*Take and eat; take and drink. Here **I am** for you...to the end of the age.*'

So, my friends, our Lord and Saviour who once humbled Himself but is now glorified at the Father's right hand, promises to glorify you too. You see, Jesus has grasped you and won't let you go, for as St Paul writes, '*If we have been united with Him like this in his death we will, certainly, also be united with Him in his resurrection.*' (Rom.6:5) Amen. To God be the glory. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Sermon by Pastor Ernie Kiss

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