

Philippians 2:5-11
Sixth Sunday in Lent
Palm Sunday
Blessings from Our Blessed God

Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church
Winchester, VA
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March 17, 2019

- ⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:
- ⁶ Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
- ⁷ rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
- ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming 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 acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Emotions were soaring as Jesus rode into Jerusalem that day on a donkey's colt. His disciples crowded around Him in joy, throwing cloaks and branches on the ground before Him and crying out words of praise, **Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!** (Matthew 21:9). The Pharisees, on the other hand, were a little less thrilled. They implored Jesus to stop His disciples and rebuke them for the things they were saying, but His answer to them was that if His disciples did not call out to praise Him the very stones would sing His praises. Finally, as the gates of Jerusalem came into view, Jesus broke down in sorrow and wept over the destruction that city would face.

Sorrow, anger, joy, and praises. It's a bit of a preview of what we have coming over the rest of the week, isn't it? As we recall the events of Jesus' betrayal and arrest, His trials and crucifixion, His burial and His glorious resurrection our emotions soar through highs and lows as we consider all that God in His great love has done for us. When we see just how greatly God has blessed us, we join our voices with the disciples that day in Jerusalem saying, **Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!**

I had an interesting conversation about that word, "blessed," earlier this week. On Tuesday I met with the other pastors from our circuit and we were looking at the benediction from Numbers 6, the

same one we hear each week at the end of our service: **The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace** (Numbers 6:24-26). One of the pastors commented how we use that blessing every week, we use the word “bless” each week. We say things like, “God bless you,” and “bless the Lord O my soul.” But do we ever stop to think about what that word “bless” really means? What does it mean for God to bless you? What does it mean for you to bless God?

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word which we translate as *bless* can also mean kneel. So when we think of the concept of blessing someone, we can bear in mind the picture of kneeling or bowing before them. When David wrote in Psalm 103, **Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits** (Psalm 103:1-2), you can feel his humility and joy. Because of what God had done for him, David wanted to kneel down body and soul before the LORD and praise Him.

In our epistle lesson, Paul wrote to the Philippians of a day when everyone would bless Jesus and His holy name. **Therefore, God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

As Christians, blessing God—bowing before Him and submitting to His will, worshipping Him alone, and loving Him above all else—is at the core of who we are and what we do. But why? What reason do we have to fall on our knees to bless and praise our God? The answer, of course, is that He has blessed us. Here now the knowledge of what it truly means to bless someone takes our breath away. That I should fall to my knees before the God who created me seems fitting and right, but that He should bow before me and you in humble, submissive, self-sacrificing love is absurd. And yet that is exactly what He’s done.

[Jesus Christ] being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to His own advantage; rather, He made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Jesus, the almighty Son of God from eternity, humbled Himself for you. He died for you and for me? But why? What purpose could He possibly have had for taking on the form of a human being and, having laid His Godly attributes aside, subjecting Himself to a horrible and shameful death on a cross?

He did it because the one plan which He had from eternity, to create people—to create you—and to have an amazingly perfect and loving relationship with you, had been made impossible by sin. Jesus came into this world because you and I and the rest of the human race were a lost cause. Our sin-corrupted natures did not want anything to do with loving God or giving Him glory but instead only loving and glorifying ourselves. Rather than gladly keeping God’s commands, we have broken them in every way imaginable. We divorced ourselves from His perfect plan to love us as our God and for us to love Him as His people bringing on ourselves God’s just wrath and the punishment which such sins deserve: hell—an eternity cut off from God and His blessings.

So in a miracle of grace beyond our understanding God the Son became human placing Himself under God’s law and living a holy life of obedience as your perfect substitute. He lived in faultless, flawless obedience to His Father in every way in which you and I have not. He came into this world to

live a righteous life of seamless conformity to His Father's will so that He could credit that righteousness to you.

And yet, His purpose in humbling Himself was about even more than living as our substitute. God the Son became human so that He could offer Himself as the atoning sacrifice for our sins—the priceless, perfect life of the Creator offered in the epitome of love and humility for the broken and worthless lives of His sinful creation.

Through Jesus humiliation we receive our new identity. We are blood-bought, forgiven children of God. Through His exaltation we receive direction for that new identity. Jesus Christ is Lord and we are His servants. What does it mean to be a servant of the Lord? It means we serve Him with the same servant-like attitude He assumed in His love for us. We have been freed by Christ. But rather than use our freedom to our own advantage, we empty ourselves and become nothing—we become servants—using our freedom to serve Jesus, His Creation, and the fallen crown of His Creation, our fellow humans, by pointing them to Him, Jesus Christ, their Savior and Redeemer.

When we hear those words, **that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord**, it's easy for our minds to skip straight to Judgment Day. We know that on the Last Day, when Jesus returns and reveals Himself in His full glory, everyone, believers and unbelievers alike, will acknowledge Him as Lord and King.

But that acknowledgment started immediately when His exaltation began. Just think about the first step of His exaltation that we confess in the Apostles' Creed: **He descended into hell**. Why did He do that? To proclaim His victory to Satan and his demons, forcing them to their knees in acknowledgement of His Lordship, triumphing over them by the cross.

And that was not the only appearance that our risen and exalted Lord made. He appeared to His disciples so that they too would know Him as their Lord. He sent His Spirit to them to strengthen them in their faith and in their understanding of the identity they had received through His death on the cross.

What He did for those first disciples He has now also done for you, coming to you through Word and Sacrament to reveal Himself as your Savior and your Lord. And so, we bow before Him, bless His name, and confess that Jesus Christ, God the Son, is Lord. We cry out with the saints in Jerusalem, **blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord**. And we marvel at the overwhelming, undeserved grace of our God, that even as that Palm Sunday crowd called out their blessings and praise to Him, it was He who had come to bless them. It was He who had come to bless us.

Emotions soar during this Holy Week as we consider the blessings we have received from our blessed God and how low He knelt to bring them to us. We pray that He continue in His mercy and love to bless us all the days of our lives, and we join the saints of all ages in the joyous cry, **Bless the Lord**.

Amen.

**The peace of God, which transcends all understanding,
will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.**