

Worship Resources - *Take a Knee* - <https://youtu.be/PpZoiFEN-mc>

17th Sunday of Pentecost, Year A,

27th September, 2020

Philippians 2:1-13 CEV / Matthew 21:23-32 CEV

Intro/Prelude

This Is My Father's World,

written by Maltbie Babcock,

played by church musician Annie Center

<https://youtu.be/vb5eOgTT9Ek>

Welcome

I'm glad to welcome you to online worship with Olympic View Community Church. We seek to welcome all of God's children to join us in bearing witness to the radically transforming power of God's love.

Our tradition at Olympic View is to begin our service greeting and wishing each other peace. For a change of pace this week, we will be listening to a familiar hymn that we often sing after greeting each other, sung in beautiful 4 part harmony. Feel free to sing along, and think about the words, "God is love." Who could we share God's love and shalom with this week?

Reflection Video *God is Love (Come, Let Us All Unite to Sing)*

posted to YouTube by SM Samonte

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WM67XFmS6hEv>

Invocation

Join me in a word of prayer.

We come to hear the stories of other people in another world long ago.

We come to hear the stories that are also about us today in this place.

God, give us ears to listen. eyes to see, hearts to accept.

We light a candle today to represent the Spirit burning within us, and among us, guiding our time together. Amen.

Our Epistle reading this morning from Philippians describes the humble outlook we should have on living our own lives. As we listen to these words from Paul, let's think about how much we focus on humility, and how pride may interfere with that focus.

Epistle Reading **Philippians 2:1-13 CEV**

Christ encourages you, and his love comforts you. God’s Spirit unites you, and you are concerned for others.

Now make me completely happy! Live in harmony by showing love for each other. Be united in what you think, as if you were only one person.

Don’t be jealous or proud, but be humble and consider others more important than yourselves.

Care about them as much as you care about yourselves
and think the same way that Christ Jesus thought:

Christ was truly God. But he did not try to remain equal with God.

Instead he gave up everything and became a slave, when he became like one of us.

Christ was humble. He obeyed God and even died on a cross.

Then God gave Christ the highest place and honored his name above all others.

So at the name of Jesus everyone will bow down, those in heaven, on earth, and under the earth.

And to the glory of God the Father everyone will openly agree, “Jesus Christ is Lord!”

My dear friends, you always obeyed when I was with you. Now that I am away, you should obey even more. So work with fear and trembling to discover what it really means to be saved.

God is working in you to make you willing and able to obey him.

Scripture Video **Philippians 2:1-13 - *Christ's Example Of True Humility***

Lectionary bible reading

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XsLnPBFVpEg>

A Time of Prayer

Today we come together as a community to share together our joys and concerns, and lift them to God in prayer. If you would like to share a specific request to be included in our communal prayer time, please leave a comment in the video below, or email myself at:

vicarglenn@gmail.com, and I'll make sure to include that request in next week's service, as well as send a prayer chain email, if you would like.

Joys and Concerns

This morning we lift up Grace Edmark as she has been moved to the hospice center at Evergreen in Kirkland and has been declining in the last several days.

We also remember Angela Zimmerman's mom, who attempted suicide this week, and is hospitalized in North Carolina. We also lift up Angela who feels helpless so far away.

We remember Nancy and Haile as they look to their return trip back from Nebraska in the next week.

We also remember Matthew Schultz as he continues to struggle with health issues and finding effective treatments.

We celebrate the rain and windy weather this week, and the relief it brings.

Let's bring these concerns and others in our lives to God together in prayer.

Pastoral Prayer

Teach us Your ways, God,

that we may come down from our heights and be open to the same Spirit who moved over the face of the waters in the first day of creation and moves also over the chaos of this time to fashion a day like this, a world like ours, a life like ours,

a kin-dom acting as leaven in the bread of earth.

And make us aware of the miracles of life, of warm and cold, of starkness and order, of screaming wind and impenetrable silences, and of the unfathomable mystery of amazing grace in which we are kept.

Teach us Your ways, God, that we may praise You for all the surprising, ingenious ways You bless us, and for all the wondrous gifts You give us, along with all the pain and joy we sustain.

Teach us Your ways, God, that we may accept our own talent openly, nurture it hopefully, develop it faithfully, and give it freely.

Teach us Your ways, God, that we may love Your kindness and practice it toward the hungry of the world, the poor and sick, and oppressed, that we may learn the healing humility that comes from You.

Teach us Your ways, God, so that our hearts are flooded with Your mercy— emptying it of what makes it firmly opposed to Your ways, so that it beats more in rhythm with You and pounds greatly for Your kingdom. Amen.

Our gospel lesson this morning presents a parable about two sons working in a vineyard in response to the question of who has authority. As we listen to this passage, let's think what authority drives our actions, and how obedient we are as children of God.

Gospel Lesson Matthew 21:23-32 CEV

Jesus had gone into the temple and was teaching when the chief priests and the leaders of the people came up to him. They asked, “What right do you have to do these things? Who gave you this authority?”

Jesus answered, “I have just one question to ask you. If you answer it, I will tell you where I got the right to do these things.

Who gave John the right to baptize? Was it God in heaven or merely some human being?”

They thought it over and said to each other, “We can’t say that God gave John this right. Jesus will ask us why we didn’t believe John.

On the other hand, these people think that John was a prophet, and we are afraid of what they might do to us. That’s why we can’t say that it was merely some human who gave John the right to baptize.”

So they told Jesus, “We don’t know.” Jesus said, “Then I won’t tell you who gave me the right to do what I do.”

Jesus said: I will tell you a story about a man who had two sons. Then you can tell me what you think. The father went to the older son and said, “Go work in the vineyard today!”

His son told him that he would not do it, but later he changed his mind and went.

The man then told his younger son to go work in the vineyard. The boy said he would, but he didn’t go.

Which one of the sons obeyed his father? “The older one,” the chief priests and leaders answered. Then Jesus told them: You can be sure that tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you ever will!

When John the Baptist showed you how to do right, you would not believe him. But these evil people did believe. And even when you saw what they did, you still would not change your minds and believe.

Scripture Video Matthew 21:23-32 ***A Question About Jesus' Authority***

Lectionary bible reading

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NvRR49NLHrU>

Message - *Take a Knee*

Showing “respect” and “honor” has often been a flashpoint in our culture. We've certainly been hearing a lot recently about the meaning and ramifications of choosing to “take a knee” in some public arenas. Different sides would have us attach meaning and significance to these displays, both positive and negative. As I studied the scripture for this week's sermon, I became aware of how this current controversy fits into the situation Paul is addressing in his correspondence with the Christians in Philippi. The church there was apparently having problems with conflict and dissent within the body. Unfortunately, we only get one side of the story when it comes to Paul's letters. We hear his response, but aren't privy to the original letter or specific situation he is responding to. But we can ascertain a lot from what he says, and sometimes more importantly, how he says it.

Like the church in Corinth, there seems to be an issue with some in Philippi feeling they have a better status than others. Roman culture at the time was all about one's status, which is determined by the conception of the honor one has obtained. And that honor is determined by one's integrity as well as one's participation in the civic rituals and worship of the day. Which is why the early Christians faced so much persecution. By refusing to participate in the cultic worship of the emperor as a living deity, they were considered less honorable. The emperor maintained his control by establishing himself as the hero of the country, as the one whose success maintained the well-being of the empire. To not revere and to worship him was to disrespect and dishonor not only the emperor, but the country as well. Likewise, the generals and military heroes of the time are considered like that of the gods, given almost a divine status. The upper classes increased their honor and status by publicly supporting and idolizing these figures. I mentioned the language that Paul uses can be very illuminating and that's particularly relevant in this situation.

Paul stresses the importance of humility and serving others in today's reading. If you are making your focus on other people, you can't focus on your own honor and privilege. But more important is how he talks about Christ in this passage. He intentionally contrasts his imagery of Christ with the propaganda of the emperor. His audience would have instantly recognized the connection. On Roman coins of the time, the emperor would be depicted above a sphere, with his foot on the sphere, stressing his dominance over the whole world achieved through military brutality and strength. Paul contrasts this image with that of a Messiah, who, “being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage...” Jesus could have chosen to claim and seize dominance or equality with God, yet chooses a path of being subordinate, as Paul says, “rather, he made himself nothing, by taking the very nature of a servant.”

Paul's letter is, in effect, a rebuttal to what one would call the "Gospel of Augustus." All those values that are so praised in Roman culture, honor, hero worship, and excessive allegiance to imperial accomplishments and leadership, are the exact opposite to the values and example that Jesus sets. He doesn't establish his reign through violence and conflict, but through humility and service, "even to death on a cross." The concern with maintaining honor, status and privilege is what led Jesus to the cross. The temple leadership was threatened by one claiming to be the messiah and keeper of the true faith. They needed to be rid of this threat. The opposite of all those values that the emperor and the empire stood for. By establishing those values in Christ, he's pointing out to the Phillipians that the ways of their worldly empire are the opposite of the kingdom they owe their allegiance to. Their interactions with each other would reflect those same attributes. Humility, service and concern for others before oneself.

So if Paul were asked about our current controversy concerning "taking a knee," his response would probably be "why should you care about it?" Why should the honor system of the empire be a Christian's concern? For Paul this would be a distraction from what we are to be concerned with. Paul is clear that we are to be working to imitate the example set by our Savior. Our concern is the well-being of others; to be of service to them. Empathy is the name of the game in God's kingdom. There is no place for rivalry and conflict.

In the parable in our reading from Matthew this morning, Jesus talks about those who say one thing and do another. Do we walk around saying we follow Christ, but then not think of others before ourselves? Do we claim the Christian title, yet participate in the imperial cultic worship of today? The larger church to which we belong, the Church of the Brethren, has a long rich tradition of putting others before ourselves, of devoting ourselves to the service of our fellow humans. Nothing exemplifies this commitment to humility and service than the simple act of feet washing, following Jesus' example. Taking a knee in the service of your brothers and sisters. Kneeling and lovingly washing the feet of another is the ultimate act of humility and service to another.

Paul talks of Jesus lowering himself to the point of a criminal's death on the cross in service to us, but we can't forget about John's example of our servant savior's love for his disciples at the last supper. Rising from the table, girding himself with a towel, and taking on a duty normally considered "beneath" the average person, reserved only for slaves and lowly servants. In that act Jesus demonstrates that none of us are above another, that no one out-classes or out-honors another. When we partake in that act ourselves, it's a reminder of our Savior's humility that we are to emulate.

When we share in the Agape meal afterwards, there is no seat of honor, we are all equal and united in our commitment to follow Christ and serve others. I can preach until I'm blue in the face, but the most effective message on this scripture can be found in the towel and basin.

As Paul advises, do we have the same mindset in us as in Christ? Do we value honor above relationships? Is our focus on worldly empires and their value and honor systems or on God's kingdom and its values of empathy and service?

I'd like to close today with a little story about distraction. A man bought a new hunting dog. Eager to see how he would perform, he took him out to track a bear.

No sooner had they gotten into the woods than the dog picked up the trail. Suddenly he stopped, sniffed the ground, and headed in a new direction. He had caught the scent of a deer that had crossed the bear's path. A few moments later he halted again, this time smelling a rabbit that had crossed the path of the deer. And so, on and on it went until finally the breathless hunter caught up with his dog, only to find him barking triumphantly down the hole of a field mouse. Sometimes Christians are like that. We start out with high resolve, keeping Christ first in our lives. But soon our attention is diverted to things of lesser importance. One pursuit leads to another until we've strayed far from our original purpose. What's important is that we don't let ourselves become distracted and caught up in the daily controversies of the world and allow ourselves to be distracted by and caught up in those dramas that run contrary to those values of Christ we are to emulate.

And daily controversies abound these days, don't they? It seems impossible to keep on top of it all, and quite frankly, it's exhausting. But maybe that's always been the purpose of these political issues, these questions of "honor?" They keep us distracted from our true work and focus as disciples. Instead of worrying about who's right and who's wrong in the current public debate, we can turn our focus away and get back to a Jesus focus. We can ask ourselves three easy questions from our own Brethren heritage, questions asked in preparation to share the Lord's supper. Are we right with God and our neighbor? Are we humble and focused on God's kingdom? Are we in this world but not of this world? I hope and pray we have the right answer to those questions. May we always look around us with empathic eyes that see the world with God's lens and not the world's. and be willing to take a knee ourselves. Amen.

Call to Serve.

As we continue to seek to be a place of compassion and support to our community, we ask that you give prayerful consideration as to how you may support our efforts. If you would like to make a donation, gifts can still be mailed to our church office, or online donations can be made through the link in the video description. Thanks again for all your support, and may we continue to work together to keep being a place of ministry that seeks to promote the growth of God's shalom around us. As we listen to this interlude, played by Annie, let's give some thought how we can humbly be God's servants this week, using our voice and talents to further the God's kingdom in this world, without being distracted by those voices of controversy all around us.

A Time for Reflection

Reflection on the Word [video]

For All The Saints,

written by William Walsham Howe,
played by church musician Annie Center

<https://youtu.be/dDh0FdtPAjg>

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

God of abundance, you fill us with good things; you satisfy our thirst; you meet our every need. From your rock, our blessings flow. Accept what we give in return: our hearts, our hands, our gifts, our love. Use them to answer the cries of a world in need. Amen.

Commission/Benediction

Go now to will and to work for God's purposes. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. Be filled with the same love and look to the interests of others. With reverence for God, work out your salvation.

And may God quench your thirst with love and consolation; May Christ Jesus strengthen you and encourage you; And may the Holy Spirit lead you on and make your joy complete.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord, carrying the spark of the Spirit within us.
.....***In the name of Christ. Amen.***

Postlude

Tears Are A Language God Understands

written by Gordon Jansen,
played by church musician Annie Center

<https://youtu.be/zCEXLo8TEgM>