

**Worship Service Resources “Take a Knee”**  
**Pentecost 18, Sunday of Pentecost, Year A,**  
**1<sup>st</sup> October 2023**  
**Philippians 2:1-13 NIV / Matthew 21:23-32 NRSVUE**

**Prelude**

**Opening Music (video) [When God Is In The Building](#)**

**performed by the House of Hope Worship Team,**

**originally performed by the Pace Sisters, uploaded to YouTube by House of Hope**

**Welcome/Announcements**

**Pass the Peace**

**Opening Hymn *All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name* 106**

**Call to Worship (responsive)**

One: Let us reach out with heart and soul to the Lord.

**All: O Lord, our God, in you we place our trust.**

One: Let us ask the Lord to lead us.

**All: Help us O Lord to find the paths we should take.**

One: Lead us in Your truth O God,

**All: And we shall rejoice in your love and goodness forever! Amen!**

**Invocation**

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.

**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 NIV***

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any

tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,

not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature[a] 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[b] 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!

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.

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,

for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

## **A Time of Prayer**

### **Joys and Concerns**

#### **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.

**Hymn**

***For the Beauty of the Earth***

**89**

**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 NRSVUE**

When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?"

Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things.

Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why, then, did you not believe him?'

But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we are afraid of the crowd, for all regard John as a prophet."

So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

"What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.'

He answered, 'I will not,' but later he changed his mind and went.

The father went to the second and said the same, and he answered, 'I go, sir,' but he did not go.

Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you.

For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him, and even after you saw it you did not change your minds and believe him.

## **Message - *Take a Knee***

Showing "respect" and "honor" has often been a flashpoint in our culture. We certainly heard a lot a few years ago 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 controversies like that fit 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 Phillipi 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 who's success maintained the well-being of the empire. That sounds kinda familiar, doesn't it? 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 focusing 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 humble values in Christ, he's pointing out to the Philippians that the ways of their worldly empire are the opposite of the kingdom they owe their allegiance to. Their interactions with each other should reflect those same attributes. Humility, service and concern for others before oneself.

So if Paul were asked about the 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 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? Or do we value honor above relationships? Is our focus on worldly empires and their value and honor systems or on God's kin-dom 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.

1. Are we right with God and our neighbor?
2. Are we humble and focused on God's kin-dom?
3. 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, in service of others. Amen.

## Call to Serve

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 kin-dom in this world, without being distracted by those voices of controversy all around us. Let's also renew our commitment to service as we prepare to say goodbye to this sacred space, and seek to be Christ's disciples in a new community space.

## A Time for Reflection

### Litany of Thanksgiving (responsive)

*One: Blessed be the name of God, whose Word has long been proclaimed within this hallowed place.*

**All: We give you thanks, O God.**

*One: As generations have prayed their prayers and sung your praises here, your Spirit has blessed countless worshipers.*

**All: We have celebrated the Lord's Supper here and been nurtured by it through our journey in faith**

*One: We have rejoiced here as believers have confessed faith in Christ*

**All: Here we have dedicated our children, been baptized, and mourned our dead.**

*One: As new families have been created through marriage,*

**All: we, our parents, and our children have vowed at this altar to love, honor, and cherish always. From within these walls many have gone out to serve you in the world.**

*One: As we go now from this house into a further journey of faith,*

**All: we give you thanks, O God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

## Hymn     *God of Grace and God of Glory*     366

## Declaration of Deconsecration

This building, having been consecrated and named the Olympic View Community Church, together with the land on which it stands and all objects that may remain in it, we now deconsecrate and release for any honorable use. We declare that it is no longer the place of regular meeting of a Church of the Brethren congregation.

## Closing Prayer

O God, as in your great goodness you have blessed the many ministries carried on by this congregation in this building, so, now and in the days and years to come, we pray that you may greatly bless your ministries in your ongoing Church. Bless

those persons who have worshiped in this building, and will now be worshiping in their new location. As disciples of the risen Christ, may we be channels at all times of your steadfast love; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

## **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**