

Palm Sunday  
Year B

Mark 11:1-11  
Isaiah 50:4-9a  
Psalm 31:9-16  
Philippians 2:5-11  
Mark 14:1 - 15:47

Throughout Lent, many Christians endeavor to focus on their personal practices - whether it be giving up certain items or pastimes for Lent or taking on new disciplines. The idea is to improve oneself in their relationship with God. While this is a very good practice, in his letter to the people of Philippi, Paul is focused on the community and what it might do to improve its relationship with God.

In the first chapter of the letter, Paul makes reference to some issues that are afflicting the community of believers in Philippi, although he is not very clear what those issues might be. Perhaps, the specifics are not needed as we can learn much from how Paul presents means of improvement. In any case, we know Paul is not addressing individuals but the community as a whole.

The corporate nature of Paul's admonition is underscored in the very first verse of our passage today. "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. Although it is hard to tell in the English, the Greek is very clear in using the second person plural pronoun, what we might say as "you all", or in Texas "all y'all". Paul is not calling for any form of personal piety, but is suggesting that the entire congregation be mentally in the same place as Christ. If we are to be in the mind of Christ, what does that mean? What is the "mind of Christ"?

Paul tells us that Jesus emptied himself and humbled himself, not exploiting his equality with God. We are called to take the lower seat, as Jesus states in one of His parables, not exulting ourselves because of our position. We are to be servants of those to whom we minister. In an earlier verse, Paul reminds the people of Philippi to look to the interests of others, rather than our self-interest. We have all that we need as a community of believers. Looking back at the beginning of the chapter, in the NRSV translation, the first verse begins, "If then there is any encouragement in Christ..." Another way of interpreting this passage is "Since then there is any encouragement in Christ..." Here it is no longer conditional, but a statement of fact. The list of statements now becomes "since there is any encouragement, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy; my joy is made complete."

Paul is emphatic in his statement that we have all these things, not conditionally, but factually. Jesus is there to encourage us, to love us, to guide us through the sharing of God's Spirit. This is what makes Paul's joy complete. Paul continues with a call to be of one mind, to be in agreement. That one mind we are called to have is the mind of Christ. In this hymn, we see that mind exposed as that of a servant, emptying Himself for us.

This is the promise given to us through Paul's letter. We are encouraged to keep looking for opportunities to help others, to be servants even as Christ showed Himself to be a Servant, not resting in His godliness, but becoming one of us to show us how to live for God. That is why Jesus has been highly exalted by God. Jesus is our example and we have only to imitate Him in our lives.