



**Super Wednesday Bible Study with Pastor Hetrick
Philippians: Joyful in All Circumstances
Philippians 2:1-13 "Since There is Comfort in Christ"
September 23, 2020**

The second chapter of Philippians opens with "Therefore if there is any comfort in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if any fellowship of spirit, if any compassion and tenderness..." but this is not the subject of doubt. The Greek language here can best be understood to say, "If there is, (AND THERE IS)." Or to be more succinct, "Since there is..."

Since there is comfort in Christ, since there is consolation of love, since there is fellowship of spirit, since there is compassion and tenderness, on the basis of that Paul now makes a request:

"Fill up my joy" with how you are thinking and doing and being.

Before we come back to that, let's take a side trip into the land of hymns. Most of us know that passages from Scripture are quoted in, and are the basis for our hymns we sing, either traditional or modern. But Scripture itself also contains hymns and worship texts. Aside from the psalms which are poetry intended to be sung in worship, early Christians relied upon hymns in their gatherings for worship as well.

The first records of what earliest Christians thought about Jesus are found in hymns that are embedded into the books of the New Testament. These hymns would have been sung or chanted in public worship, divinely inspired, proclaiming the saving acts of Christ. Paul gives evidence of this in several places. In 1st Corinthians 14:26- "When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lessons a revelation, a tongue or interpretation."

The foundations of these hymns were events in the life of Jesus, particularly his Passion, and the Hebrew Scriptures especially the Psalms and Wisdom literature such as Psalms 2,22, and 118. The earliest Christians interpreted their experience of the Risen Lord and the Holy Spirit in light of the Psalms. Hymns served two purposes- worship and catechesis, or teaching. These hymns are referred to as "Christ hymns." Today's passage in Philippians includes a well known "Christ hymn."

New Testament texts that include these Christ hymns include Philemon 2:6-11; Colossians 1:15-20; John 1:1-14; Hebrews 1:3; 1 Timothy 2:5-6; and 1 Peter 2:21-25. The Book of Revelation is also a rich resource of such hymns (1:4-8; 4:8; 5:9-10, 12; 11:15, 17-18; 15:3-4; 22:17). These hymns speak of the equality of Jesus and God the Creator; Jesus' role in creation, and its sustenance and redemption; and his death, resurrection and exaltation by which humanity and cosmic powers are subjected to him.¹

¹ Philippians and Philemon, pp. 77-79

In the Greco-Roman world, hymns were composed and sung to emperors and other deities as gods. The Roman official, Pliny the Younger wrote to Emperor Trajan that the Christians come together on a regular day to "sing a song alternately to Christ as god," suggesting there was antiphonal singing. But what if for a moment we imagined that the hymns we sing (or listen to) were an alternative language to the language of our cultural world?

As a practical exercise, why not take the words of one of your favorite hymns and read them- what do those words tell you about Christ? If you have a worship book at home you can look up in the back what scriptural references the hymn uses. The internet site, www.hymnary.org allows you to search your favorite hymn and learn about its scriptural references as well. Unlike more modern praise music, "Christ hymns" were not so much about praising and thanking God. They were a means of teaching ABOUT Jesus Christ and about morality/ethics. They served as tools for evangelism and witnessing to the unity of Christian belief.

Paul inserts a hymn in Chapter 2 of Philippians, in this case for teaching but also a pastoral reason. Remember that Paul is affirming the comfort, consolation of love, fellowship of spirit, compassion and tenderness in this Christ-centered community and asking them to fill up his joy, or make his joy complete, by having the same opinions, the same love, being one-souled and thinking that embodies a commitment to:

Do nothing from selfish ambition, nothing from empty glory, but in humility. Consider not only yourselves, but consider the things of others.

As a community redeemed by Christ and sustained by the Holy Spirit, this is the source of Paul's joy, their joy, and the joy they mediate as a community.

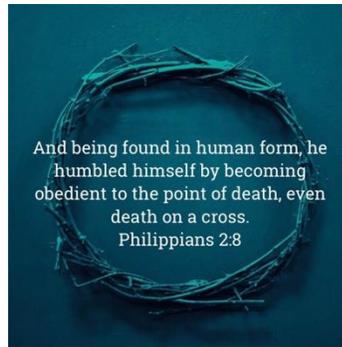
Nothing would give greater joy than to know that they continue even in both his absence and struggles to hold fast to the identity he taught them, faith in Jesus as the Christ.

Verses 5-11, which embody the Christ hymn in Philippians unites this pastoral mindset with teaching of Christ:

"Have this mind among you," refers to the mindset Paul just described, the mind which was in Christ.

"Even though he was the essence of God, he did not consider equality with God something to be grasped."

Scholar N.T. Wright has said that this word, "Grasped" is central to understanding the whole hymn. This grasping is akin to snatching or usurping, or seized onto. In other words, Jesus refused to latch onto the chance to use his position to take advantage or lord over others for his own purposes. This means that Jesus did not excuse himself from experiencing human suffering. Though Jesus was fully divine, meaning he had the power to change his circumstances, this verse speaks of Jesus in terms of what he did NOT do.



This mindset, "having opinions" or "being "minded," is a term Paul uses at least ten times in this letter. While the Philippians may not be of the same mind in everything, they should strive to be like minded with Christ. Paul's speaks of Christ who emptied himself, refusing to engage in self-aggrandizement. The God in Christ Jesus we proclaim enters our world by becoming incarnate as a slave, as a servant. Christ voluntarily enters into the bondage systems of our world to become one with us, living on the margins, teaching about love and forgiveness, bringing healing and restoration, before experiencing humiliation and crucifixion.

If we are to become like Christ, we begin by hearing how Christ became like us and still comes to us today. Then we can not only be comforted by such a Lord, we can worship and confess, tell others, who this Christ is so they too can encounter the good news to that redeems us from a world of systems of bondage, oppression and suffering.

As Paul is in prison, and his followers wonder about how to live as the church, they surely feel that they are suffering, and uncertain. The Christ hymn Paul uses not only teaches, it reassures them. It also gives them a purpose for this time, as Paul asks them to sustain him while he is in prison.

What will sustain him, in addition to their prayers, is the knowledge that they continue in the way he has taught them, serving and bearing witness to the Lord he serves. Paul has been humbled, but even in prison this will give him joy-knowing that the church in Philippi remains grounded in the Christ of the cross and the community that Christ mediates in the world.

Imagine them singing the Christ hymn together to bind themselves as a community to Christ, and to fellow believers and to Paul.

Coming back to our time, what hymns are based upon this passage that we sing today?

I have listed some hymns based upon Philippians 2:1-11 found in our ELW.

Some may be easy connections to make. As I looked at them, I noticed, they seem to focus in one of two general directions.

Most focus upon that line in verse 10, that "at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow." Or that God exalted Christ in verse 9:



All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name, ELW 634
At the Name of Jesus, ELW 416
Crown Him with Many Crowns ELW 855
Jesus Shall Reign Where'er the Sun, ELW 434
Hark the Herald Angels, ELW 270
Holy God We Praise Your Name, ELW 414

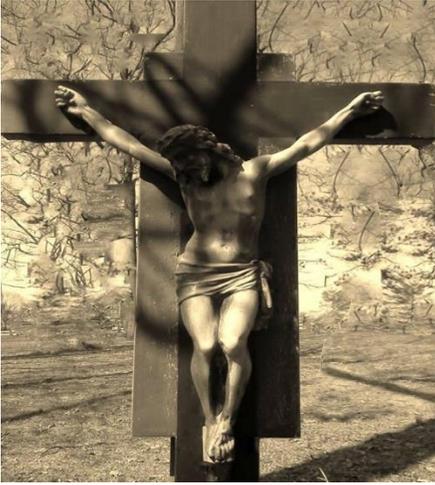
verse 10
verse 10
verse 9
verse 10
verses 8-10
verse 10



Contrast that with the focus upon servanthood of Christ and ourselves, found in verses 1-6 and verse 8 and 11.

Lift High the Cross, ELW 660
Of the Father's Love Begotten, ELW 295
O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High, ELW 322
What Wondrous Love is This, ELW 666
The Servant Song, ELW 659
Blest Be The Tie That Binds, ELW 656

verses 1, 11
verse 11
verses 1,8
verses 6-8
verses 1-5
verse 1-5



How do these hymns align with or function differently from the Christ hymns of Scripture? Our hymns have moved more into praising and thanking God. They are not always a means of teaching ABOUT Jesus Christ and morality/ethics, serving as tools for evangelism and the unity of Christian belief. Or at least we may not often see them that way. As an aside, in our Grace Notes newsletter, there are regular articles about music- I encourage you to check these out.

Setting aside for a second, which tunes you like best, what about the text? What do these hymns teach? If the first lines are a strong indicator, here are some:

"All hail the power of Jesus' name, let angels prostrate fall. Bring forth the royal diadem and crown him Lord of all."

"At the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow, every tongue confess him, King of glory now."

"Crown him with many crowns, the lamb upon the throne."

"Jesus shall reign where'er the sun does its successive courses run."

OR

"Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim."

"What wondrous love is this, O my soul?"

"Will you let me be your servant, let me be as Christ to you?"

"Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love."

Perhaps one question to ask as we come back to thinking about "Since there is comfort in Christ," is which of these two focus points is the one you most remember being taught, or sung?

Another question might be which brings greater comfort to you- the exaltation of a victorious king, or the loving servant who uses us to be servants to one another?

Both of course are true and valid, but if one stands out more, chances are that is how we see the church and our place in it and in the world.

Paul, who has asked the community to live life in a manner worthy of the gospel, narrows the focus in chapter 2. It is an appeal for unity and humility. This humility is grounded in the example of Christ's humbling. It is the opposite of upward mobility and ambition, and honor seeking. It is in this sense that Christ is Lord- we are not. Humility is a necessary ingredient for unity. Paul is marrying our way of thinking with our way of living.

**Humbled versus highly exalted
Obedience versus lordship
Death versus eternal glory
Earthly versus heavenly realities**

Paul tells us we have to work it out- not because we have to accomplish our salvation by works of righteousness. Instead, we have to wrestle with how to live as those who believe these things. How do we do this in the here and now? How do our lives proclaim the God who is at work in the world and in us? In this time when we find we cannot be together as we wish, how are we the body of Christ in the world, and how do we know and share signs of God's love and comfort?

Perhaps you will take a moment to reach out to someone else, either here at Grace or elsewhere to support one another in prayer, and remind one another of Christ's love and power. Maybe even share this lesson.

Perhaps you will choose to be a servant who shows God's love in one of the ways we here at Grace engage in this fall.

Right now, is our Lutheran World Relief ingathering to send small but meaningful care supplies like soap, toothbrushes and washcloths to those suffering in refugee camps and other places of suffering.

Lutheran Disaster Response collection begins in October to collect for those who are and will be struggling with the effects of storms, wildfires, and earthquakes here and around the world.

The CROP Walk, which collects funds for the hungry here and around the world is taking place virtually the week of October 11th. Information is now available on our website.

We will soon begin collecting for the Food Bank, and for Jared boxes which provide comfort and joy to children in hospitals in our region.

How might you set aside something you perhaps want to follow Jesus in one or more of these ways?

This is not just good works we do to feel good. No one is keeping score. They are meaningful and life-giving expressions of those words Paul gave: These are expressions of how God might use you to make someone's joy complete. Chances are you too will know joy.

**Since there is comfort in Christ, since there is consolation of love, since there is fellowship of spirit, since there is compassion and tenderness,
"Fill up my joy" with how you are thinking and doing and being.**