
Let the same mind be in you that was[a] in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross. Philippians 2:5-8

At this time in the world, we are seeing more and more disturbing images and accounts of the terrible events in Ukraine. These are disturbing times, and we wonder how someone can cause such destruction, and how we ought to respond. How have you felt at this time? Disturbed? Unsettled? Questioning if God can really be in control?

At one level, as Christian people, we always have hope. And here are five ways Open Doors suggests we can pray for Ukraine and Russia today:

- 1) Pray for peace. Pray for violence and tension to end, and that leaders on all sides would pursue diplomacy and peace in a way that allows people of all faiths to live in freedom and peace.
- 2) Pray for believers in Ukraine and Russia, to build bridges of love and hope that would transcend any conflict between their countries. Ask that God would work to overcome divisions and that His power would be visible to all.
- 3) Ask that God would open the hearts of leaders in Russia and in areas of Ukraine under Russian control, that they would not restrict the ability of believers to worship God freely.
- 4) When war happens, so many innocent lives are upended and affected. Pray that human rights would be protected and that peace would break out anew in this part of the world.
- 5) Pray that God would work through the diplomacy of countries around the world, and that His peace would prevail.

As we uphold this terrible situation in prayer, we also remember God’s suffering for all people. We sometimes think that Christianity is about everything going well, our health being restored, and prosperity in this life. But the Bible describes a significantly different picture of the Christian life.

What did Jesus say on more than one occasion about the cross? He said (eg: Mathew 16:24-25): “If any want to become My followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for My sake will find it.” We also hear our Lord say (John 16:33): “In this world you will have trouble.”

But the Lord who speaks of the realities of our world is the Lord who steps into our darkness and sin.

In our Bible Reading this day (Philippians 2:6) we hear this about Jesus, "Though He was in the form of God, [He] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped or held onto" (Philippians 2:6). In other words, the true and almighty Son of God gave up His power and authority. He let go of His high position and became a human being in order to save us. Verses seven and eight continue: "But He, Jesus, emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:7-8).

In Philippians 2:6 the phrase *although He existed in the form of God* - the Greek word '*form*' refers to the outward expression which a person gives of his inmost nature. In other words, '*form*' means nature and character, not shape, as we would think. This means Jesus is in the '*form*' of the One True God (John 14:7-11).

In Philippians 2:7 the phrase '*but emptied Himself* - the Greek word '*emptied*' means to empty oneself, to divest oneself of rightful dignity by descending to an inferior condition, to abase or humiliate oneself.

In Philippians 2:7-8a the phrase *taking the form of a bond-servant and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in human appearance* - means when Jesus took on the new inmost nature of our human nature at His incarnation, His outward expression as a human was that of a servant.

Just consider Who Jesus is, and then realize that He literally divested Himself of His glory, power and privilege as God, and voluntarily allowed Himself to be humiliated as our suffering servant to the point of even dying on a cross.

That's what Jesus did. He took the form of a human being and humbled Himself to the point of being punished for your sin and mine on the cross. He stepped into the wreckage of our lives and took the brunt of our failures, rebellion, brokenness, and sin. The humble Son of God on the cross saved your life. He saved my life. He atoned for the sin of the whole world. He's a Rescuer unlike any other. If you've known Jesus for a long time, listen carefully to receive renewed hope and strength in Him.

The mystery of the Suffering Servant is, indeed, a strange design. Yet, this is what led the apostle Paul to declare that he determined "to know nothing while I was with you but Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). It is in the presence of the Crucified One, God's Suffering Servant, that we finally begin to see the full contours of God's great plan. In the gift of God's Son into the world—One born to suffer and die—we finally come to fully know and comprehend the love of God.

Some people on this earth are disappointed in the love they received from their parents, or, if married, from their spouse. However, in Jesus Christ the fullness of God's love is revealed. It is love alone that transforms us. We will never hate our sin enough to leave it. It is God's love that transforms us and empowers us to change. It is in the arms of His great embrace that we discover what it really means to be a child of God, adopted into His family.

There are many wonderful things we can say about God. We can joyfully declare that our Triune God is a great King or our High Priest or the greatest Prophet, but there is no greater declaration than the profound truth that God is love, holy love. Yes, God is love—we know it because Jesus Christ came into the world as the Suffering Servant. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

In Philippians 2:1–11, we come to one of the most important passages in the entire New Testament. The Christ hymn that takes up the second half of this passage has, for good reason, demanded an incredible amount of attention within this book. In only a few verses, Paul's writing takes us from the incomprehensible depths of eternity when the Son existed in the form of God to the point where he willingly takes on the form of a servant through his incarnation, and then down to the depths of his death on the cross, only to soar back up into the cosmos with Jesus exalted as Lord over all creation. What a magnificent Saviour we worship!

Jesus Christ knew His power but He set it aside willingly. He wasn't forced into helping people, into healing their body or forgiving their sins. He went all the way to the cross and while it looked like Rome or the religious authorities had put Him there, that was only the appearance. The true fact is that, as has often been said, the nails didn't hold Jesus to the cross, love did. And because of this, our risen Lord Jesus is approachable.

On the Sunday before Jesus gave His life on the cross, He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. The day is called Palm Sunday. For thousands of years, the church has celebrated that entry into the city of Jerusalem as God's victory ride for the world. But, Jesus came riding a donkey instead of a warhorse. He came in peace and humility. Many welcomed Jesus by waving palm branches and shouting, "Hosanna!" which means "Save now!" The people knew they needed to be rescued. But Jesus didn't come like the political conquerors or the military conquerors of the day. (Have you ever noticed that their victories never last?)

Jesus showed us that true power isn't in dominating someone or forcing them to do your will but in serving them, helping people in their time of need (or even when they don't have a need!) We're beginning what looks to be a unique Holy Week, but we still need to hold His suffering, sacrifice, and salvation for us in mind

As we reflect on situations around the world, and also what surrounds our immediate lives, it is easy to become discouraged. Paul wrote to the church in Philippi during a time of personal suffering in his own ministry. He had been imprisoned (likely in Rome) for the sake of preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. He wrote to a church that, likewise, was suffering persecution (1:27 – 30) for their witness to that same gospel. Through the letter, Paul also exhorts us to have the same mind and attitude while portraying Jesus Christ as a humble servant (Phil 2:5–11).

To have hope in the Lord is the same thing the Psalmist was calling himself to do in Psalm 42:5. Remember he said, “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.” He and we can hope in God, can hope in the Lord Jesus, because He is our salvation and our God.

What can we do, to not only cope in this broken world, but what can we do to be faithful and praise God in this broken world? If everywhere we look there seems to be no hope, only tragedy, then what are we to do?... We can, we are to, we must hope in God... We shouldn't just cope, but we should hope... When we remember who God is and all that He has done, is doing, and will do... all that He's promised, and all that's coming... then we can say with the Psalmist, “I will again praise Him, my salvation and my God!” And this is really what the book of Philippians is all about: it's about having joy in Christ come what may—knowing that to live is Christ and to die is gain because He is infinitely better than anything the world could give us or take from us—so that Christ is honoured in and through us in life and death.

Our Bible Passage this day begins with “Let this mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). For some people, this is a call to a particular type of behaviour (and it is true this is part of the text). But there is more to this: it is to remember (keep in mind) all that Jesus has done, and is doing, for you! This the first day of Passion Week; and this text (Philippians 2:5-11) is the keynote of Passion Week. It tells us of the obedience of Christ; of the unselfishness of Christ; and, therefore, of the true glory of Christ. We remember that Jesus is our Saviour!

There are those who will tell you that you can go skipping through this with next to no problems. But that is neither real nor true. It is certainly not what St. Paul is teaching here. But there is a transformation based on the life of Jesus that takes every sorrow, every defeat, every problem, every trial, every heartache, every tear and mixes it together with the love of God in Christ. This is the Gospel of Palm Sunday. And the Lord rides into your life and mine today with the message of the Gospel, “Give your life away that you may gain eternal life; go down to serve that you may be exalted.” And those who have tasted the glorious power of this Palm Sunday message will even answer, “Blessed is He [Jesus] who comes in the name of the Lord!” Amen.