

Philippians 2:1-11 Sunday 24th January 2021

If anyone asks you – so what difference does your faith make...what would you say?

There are nicer people than me, kinder people, more compassionate people. How many of you watched the Sikh community in Gravesend making hundreds of meals a week for the NHS staff at Darent Valley Hospital. We see example after example of good people helping others during the pandemic, helping the poor and those in need.

So, being a Christian doesn't make us any better than anyone else...

Add to that, how many people we know in our fellowship who have been or are seriously unwell. How many people we have been praying for, who have sadly and tragically not made it, in this life?

Being a Christian doesn't prevent difficult life events from happening.

So, what difference does being a Christian make, to our lives?
Unless **we** know, how can we expect others to be interested?

This is precisely the question Paul is tackling in these verses.

Therefore....our passage starts with therefore.... We heard last week that, despite difficulties we can learn to find deep joy in unity with Christ. And here in Chapter 2, we see what standing firm in that unity brings.

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...

That word 'if' in verse 1 can also be translated 'since'. So rather than 'if' which could imply we might not have..... Paul is saying since,

in other words - we already do enjoy these advantages, these privileges that come from being united with Jesus through his Holy Spirit..

Since we are **encouraged** by our union with Christ

Since we have **comfort** from his **love**

Since we **share the same Spirit with one another**

Since we have experienced his **tenderness and compassion** because of our union with Christ...

That last phrase, tenderness & compassion, is translated in The King James version as 'bowels and mercy' – this is not just wishy-washy squidgy feeling. In Jesus, he brings such a heartfelt tenderness and extraordinary compassion and mercy, which is way beyond anything we could ever imagine, and way beyond what we deserve.

This is the mystery of our faith, not easy to explain or share, but those who have a close relationship with Christ, know its reality.

And Paul is saying, if – or since – we have experienced the love, comfort, tenderness and compassion of Christ and since we all share in this through the Spirit....

Live it out and do so together. Paul says ‘Make my joy complete by being like-minded, being one in spirit and of one mind’

In verse 3 Paul reminds us that if, or indeed since, we are united with Jesus, we cannot persist with the two great enemies of unity –

The two things that turn people off seeking Jesus and that is ...

Selfish ambition and Vain conceit. In other words, pride The most prevalent and pervasive sin in all humanity...

Pride says

“I know best”

“I know better than God”

“I will live life my own way”

“No-one tells me what to do”

“I am never wrong”

“I am better than others”

Pride is dangerous because it destroys.

- It destroys friendships,
- It destroys relationships and especially our relationship with God,

And we all suffer from it, we all need healing from it, myself as much as anyone else. And Andrea reminded us last week that even St Paul struggled with his situation and battle with the natural human reactions and emotions and yes, perhaps even pride.

And here Paul is passing on his hard-fought understanding and teaches, no, shows us how to tackle a disease more contagious and more deadly than any virus.

In our dealings with each other, he calls us to value others above ourselves, in other words, to be humble.

Not the ‘ever so ‘umble’ of Uriah Heep in Charles Dickens, but having the same mindset as Christ Jesus...

Now this could be...have this mind in you, like Jesus had or maybe, more in keeping with what I said 2 weeks ago, have this mind in you, which is yours in Christ Jesus.

It’s a bit like the if – since understanding that we saw at the beginning of this chapter. It’s not ‘if you work hard at being humble then’ but **since** you already have encouragement from being united with Christ, since we already have humility because we are in Jesus. And so it is to Christ we look for humility.

We look at Jesus within us to find the source of our humility.

And Paul encourages us by describing the astonishing humility of the Jesus that lives within us...Yes, we have the King of the Universe dwelling in us which makes us bold but this king is a humble king and Paul spells that out for us, in what many believe is an early Christian hymn.

Paul points out that Jesus, who being in very nature God, is as much God as the Father is, and yet he did not use force to be recognized as such by the world. God came as a baby. He made himself nothing, he literally emptied himself Not that he was no longer God, he was still God, but he emptied himself of his own desires and was willing to become as lowly as a slave.

Now slaves were nobodies in Greek culture – and Jesus' humility was to become the lowest of the low. In fact, it gets worse. Paul tells us that Jesus sank even lower than a slave. He was humble enough to willingly dying on a cross like a runaway slave.

Death on a cross would have been abhorrent, shocking. Nobody wore a cross round their neck in Philippi – it was too offensive. To the Jews crucifixion implied that the victim was excommunicated and outside the covenant of God, because as it says in Deut 21:23 'anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse... Such a despised death was utterly inconceivable for one who was God!

He had no need to die, he was God! Yet he chose to accept death on our behalf, to free us from the power of sin and death.

Paul says that Jesus stooped this low for us, and that he wants to help us stoop this low, for others too.

Verse 5 'In your relationship with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.

I've heard many a sermon explaining that we are to be humble but we're not to be Christian doormats... Jesus was not only 'walked all over' but was flogged, and hung on a cross until he had no strength to raise his chest and died by slow agonising asphyxiation for you and for me.

In some countries Christians are called to die for their faith. This is challenging stuff.

By God's grace most of us here are NOT called to die for our faith, but we are called to have the same mindset as Christ –

So let's look at Jesus' life. What was his mindset?

He always did what His Father asked Him to do

He didn't think he knew best

Jesus always submitted to His Father, even when it meant he was going to suffer

Not only that, but Jesus was willing to see the best in other people and put their needs before his own.....we remember times when he was tired and wanted to rest but the crowds pursued him and rather than turn them away, he had compassion.

Even on the night that he was arrested, Jesus washed his disciples' dirty feet.

So, humility says:

I am not better than anyone else

“God is great and I am small, therefore I will believe what God says and do what God asks”

“I am willing to serve other people”

It is hard, it doesn't come naturally to the majority of us who are battling with human pride. God's kingdom is different to the worlds. But, God raises up the humble, he blesses the humble.

In v 9–11, Paul points out the amazing results of Jesus' humility. Because he refused to assert his own cause, God the Father “therefore” asserted his cause for him, by exalting him to the highest place and decreeing that every human being, every angel and every demon must now bow down and recognize he is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords –the God who is known throughout the Old Testament as the Lord. Jesus was Yahweh already.

It was only because he was willing to humble himself by dying on the cross that he has now been revealed to the world as Yahweh.

Because he was willing to become like a slave, God the Father has revealed him to the whole world as Yahweh. God came in humility, this is what makes our faith so very different to others. This is how we are able to know God and have a personal relationship with Him. This is how we know how much God loves us.

He is offering us a choice. Will we hold onto our pride and therefore refuse the benefits of travelling the way of the cross?

Or will we search for and walk with Jesus and therefore allow God to promote **us**, to lift us up as we refuse to promote ourselves?

So, what difference does being a Christian make to our lives?

Well, it's a journey, but as we pursue the Jesus within us and commit to make this song from 2 Philippians our own....we acknowledge that

- we are not better than anyone else,
- we do not suffer less than anyone else, indeed we can suffer more because of our faith,

and if we have Jesus living in us. – No! SINCE we have Jesus living in us

- we commit ourselves to becoming humble,
- we bow down to Him,
- we put others before ourselves we know God's blessing on us.

And as we seek to be humble as church together, living in humility with one another...not looking to our own interests but, each of us looking to the interests of the other. God will raise us up and bless us.

As we live this out, those around us will see that humility is not a weakness, but a powerful way of relating to others which brings positive change.

Our churches can become beautiful expressions of heaven that others will be attracted to.

Thank Christ he is a Humble King. Amen