

A sermon preached at St. George's Anglican Church Calgary, by the Rev. Clara King, October 1 2017.

Proper 26 - Year A

Philippians 2:1-13

Matthew 21:23-32

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts, be always acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder,
Consider all the worlds thy hands have made;
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed.

Then sings my soul, my saviour God to thee,
How great thou art, how great thou art.
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How great thou art, how great thou art.

How many of us, can't hear the words of this hymn without the music running through our heads? We hear these words, and read them rhythmically, as if we're singing them accompanied by music. The moment I hear any one of the phrases in this hymn, the entire song springs to mind, and stays with me for days and days. And because of this hymn, I find that when I'm overcome by the beauties of God's creation, or overcome by an experience of grace or compassion, I'll often say, "my God, how great thou art!"

Now imagine our reading from Philippians this morning, which includes this beautiful hymn to Christ our saviour, 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.

Therefore God also highly exalted him, and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." [Philippians 2:6-11]

We can't tell it now, but this is a hymn - as familiar to the Philippians as How Great Thou Art is familiar to us. In the original language, this passage has a distinct rhythm, and so we can imagine the Philippians, listening to this letter read out loud to them in the congregation, catching the opening lines of this passage, and starting to hum along, or even, starting to break out into song.

And so we imagine Paul writing this letter, and illustrating his point, by breaking into song - a song every one of his readers would have known by heart, a song they might have been singing for years, a song, which until this moment meant one thing, and now, through Paul's genius, is about to take on a whole new meaning for them.

We always focus on this hymn as the centre of this passage, but it's not. Paul's not trying to teach them about Jesus Christ, and his incarnation and how he saves, because they already know it: they already know that song - literally - they have it memorized! Now, he's trying to connect what they know in their brains, what they know in their voices, with how they live together as brothers and sisters in Christ, in their community.

This whole passage isn't focused on Christ: it's focused on encouraging the Philippians to take what they know and live it out tangibly, in their common life. And what they know is this: that Christ lived his life for others - that's what the song says. Now, Paul says, you also are to follow his example: just as Christ did, so you also are called to live your life for others.

You know the song, you know the ideas, you know the concepts: the question is, how are we going to live this all out?

How are we going to live this all out is the question for our congregation these days, too. We know that Christ invites us to new life. We know that God's grace is endless, and God's invitation to us is boundless. We know that the Holy Spirit works in our lives to transform us. We know, "Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father; there is no shadow of turning with thee; thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not, as thou hast been thou forever wilt be." We know the hymn, we know the song. But how do we live the song?

Yesterday, 35 of us gathered at the Falconridge Castleridge Community Hall to talk about how we're going to grow the church, and share ideas with one another about our present and our future. And that may seem like a remarkably non-

spiritual thing to spend a Saturday on. But it was powerfully spiritual: because this is how we live the song. We live the song by how we treat one another. We live the song by working out how to invite new people to come to church, and by being thoughtful about how we welcome people. How do we live the song of our faith when we're at work cleaning chalices? When we're counting the collection? When we're trying not to spill wine down people's blouses? How do we live the song when we're caring for people, and making space to care for new people?

These are not organizational questions; they're not administrative questions - they are questions about how we live out our faith as disciples of Christ. They're questions that challenge us, like Paul called the Philippians, to take what we know in our heads and in our songs, and put it into action in our lives - even just a little more intentionally.

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As we raise our voices this morning, as we delight in singing together and making a joyful noise, I invite us to imagine: what if we lived these songs just a little more? What if our lives themselves sang? That would be "amazing grace. How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I'm found; was blind but now I see. Through many dangers toils and snares, I have already come; 'tis grace that brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home."