

Sometimes we human beings like to fantasise about what we would do
If we had access to a great deal of money
Or if we had real power, or wonderful good looks
Or outstanding strength or athletic ability
It's not difficult to go into a reverie, for example, about what we'd do
If suddenly we came into possession of 1 Billion dollars
I've got my plan ready to go
The different properties I'd own; the meals I'd enjoy
The places that I'd go to...
I need no encouragement to do it, it comes naturally
Even with the coronavirus around... it's easy to get on this train of thought
Maybe you're on this train of thought right now
About what you'd do if you could do as you pleased
Well, let's get off that train
It won't actually bring us peace, or grow us in love
It won't shape our character in a Godly way: it's a vain train
It's going nowhere, helping no one
But I'm not suggesting we should be unconcerned
About living with freedom
Or joy or the fullness of life
On the contrary
Today I'm proclaiming the Good News from God's word
That God has a train of thought
A way of thinking, a mindset, to give us
That is far richer and delightful than any natural way of thinking
It's Jesus' way of thinking
That becomes ours as we hear what he has done for us
And as we confess who he is
It's a way of thinking that shapes our own lives
And the real world in a tangible way
That brings joy and peace in the human community
And that leads to Jesus' name being glorified

Before we get into today's section of Scripture, I want to back up a bit, and read out to you the verses that come directly before our reading.
St Paul is writing to the Christians in Philippi.

From other parts of the letter we can conclude that he is writing under house arrest in Rome.

By the way: being in custody did not stop St Paul proclaiming the Gospel. It did not stop if the word of God from going out – that's encouraging to us. Even under the restrictions that we face – with our churches closed, and with social distancing in place in our community.

God's word can do its work

Of turning people back to God; of bringing them to trust

Anyway, St Paul is writing to the Christian in Philippi

And this is what he has to say: **If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy [and there is – these are all things that we have as a gift from God] , make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.**

Here St Paul is presenting to us a picture of Christian life

That flows from God's great love for us in Christ Jesus

And that is marked by a willingness of each member of the community

To have a team mindset: to see the goal of life not only in individual terms

But in terms of what will build up the community

Think of a sporting analogy: from soccer

A team has the best chance of playing a victorious game

Not when each player acts as if they are the star

But when they work together to the best of their skill

According to the positions that they have

So : the goalie serves best not only by defending well

But by making sure the ball gets to the other players

So that they can have the best chance of scoring a goal for the team

As God's people we are on the same team: we find out goal

In living out our own vocations

And in serving others as they live out theirs

Now we hear the beginning of today's reading

And it's about the mindset, the attitude of Jesus Christ

And how we are free to share in it

This is what St Paul says:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

**who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,**

When we humans fantasise about having wealth or power or glory
We usually and naturally think about what we could do for ourselves
But in Christ Jesus we see how God thinks
And we see how a *true human being*, made in God's image, thinks
Jesus is a true human being, the Son of Mary
But he is also true God, the Son of the Father
In his earthly ministry he did not think about using his status
To win for himself the glory of this world
He knew that the path of love is the true path of life
And so, rather than exploit his divine status for his own ends
He became a servant in love

This is what St Paul writes:

**but [he] 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.**

These last words are familiar to us: we sing them during Lent
They come from this reading
Our Lord Jesus poured himself
In obedience to the Father, out of love for the world
He came not to be served, but to serve
And to give his life as a ransom for many
Even though this meant his death on a cross

In the ancient world death on a cross
Was the ultimate punishment
Set aside for rebellious slaves, for violent criminals
And yet, out of obedience to the Father
And out of love for the world, Jesus took this path
Even to the cross
*The same hands, as the song says, that flung stars into space
Were to cruel nails surrendered*

But it is not as if death is presented as the goal of Jesus' life
Jesus goal was obedience to his Father
And where there is God, there is not death, but life

It is true that his life of service
Did not earn him in life the acclaim and thanks of the human community
But it was honoured by the Father
Jesus himself had said that all those who exalt themselves would be humbled
And all those who humble themselves would be exalted
Would be exalted *by God*, by the Father
And this is what we see with glorious clarity
In the path that Jesus himself took
This is what St Paul writes:

**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.**

The cross, from which Jesus cried out
My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Was not the final chapter of Jesus' life
It is not the end of the Gospel, but the beginning of the exaltation
Through his life of service, through his death on the cross
Jesus is not only exalted by the Father
But given the name 'Lord' – which reveals to us
What true authority is
So that we bend our knees before him, and confess him as Lord

And not just as 'Lord' in the sense of a specially honoured human being
But as God in the flesh
In the last part of this reading St Paul is alluding to Isaiah 45
Listen to the word of the Lord as it is written in Isaiah 45:

Turn to me and be saved,
all the ends of the earth!
For I am God, and there is no other.
By myself I have sworn,
from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness
a word that shall not return:
'To me every knee shall bow,
every tongue shall swear.' Isaiah 45:22-23

To *me* every knee bow, every tongue swear

To Jesus Christ, our Lord – and our God

This is why we have these words in our Small Catechism:

I believe that Jesus Christ is my Lord. He is truly God – he has always been the Son of the Father, He is also a real human being, the Virgin Mary's son. Jesus rescued me when I was sentenced to death. He set me free from all my sins, from death, and from the power of the devil. It cost him more than gold or silver. It cost him his life. Even though he was holy and innocent, he suffered and died for me.

For you

This is the message of the Gospel: not what we can do for God

But what God has done for us

It is this Gospel message that frees us to think in a new way

And to open our eyes to new opportunities

Our status is assured by God

In baptism into Christ, all that is his, is yours

The Spirit will teach you what this means

As you meditate on Jesus' words, on his life

And as God gives you opportunities to show love

To your fellow members here at Bethlehem

To your fellow Christians, wherever they may be

And to your neighbour, as you show yourself to be a neighbour

As you look out for the interests of others

God has given us this freedom, so let us live in it

To the glory of God the Father. Amen!