

The St. John's Pulpit

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WHAT KIND OF GOD IS THIS?

Philippians 2:1-11 and Gospel of Mark 14:12-16

Fifth Sunday in Kingdomtide, October 1, 2017

World Communion Sunday

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Very rarely has a conversation between two criminals contributed to theology. Yet, that is exactly what happened that Friday afternoon on a hill outside Jerusalem. Two thieves disagreed about a rabbi from Galilee being crucified between them. One chastised the Galilean mocking him, saying, *“If you are the Christ, save yourself AND US.”* Honestly, I doubt whether that fellow cared whether the Rabbi saved himself; he was focused on himself. The other criminal was honest, humble, vulnerable, authentic and confessional. Jesus ignored the criminal who expressed ridicule, anger and fear while affirming the humility of the other. Jesus often affirmed humility; he exemplified and taught humility; for Jesus, humility is a sign of greatness. One reason why the God revealed by Jesus is still so misunderstood is because Jesus reveals a humble God. We understand we God requires that we do justice and love mercy while walking humbly with God.

What Kind of God is this to Elevate Humility as a Core Characteristic of Spiritual Living?

Every day, you go forward into a world where humility is devalued.

The forces of fragmentation push on you to embrace anything and everything other than humility.

Members of Christ's Church have always been encouraged to use power, prestige & position rather than humility.

The scriptures we read this morning from Philippians and Mark were written between the years 50 and 75. The first century Church wrestled with humility; As a suffering Church, they desired to alleviate their suffering? Should they align themselves with those in power? Should they ask less of themselves than Jesus asked of them? Could they ask less of themselves than Jesus asked of them and still consider themselves to be Jesus' disciples? Jesus' persecuted followers had scattered into North Africa, Asia and throughout the Roman Empire. Imagine the clouds of discouragement overshadowing those early followers of the Jesus' Way. Paul, who was imprisoned for his commitment to Jesus, wrote to the persecuted Church. He writes, *‘find encouragement in Christ; consolation in love; share in the Spirit of God; express compassion and sympathy – but make my joy complete by having the same mind that was in Christ.’* He describes Jesus' mind as one who did not clutch his divine prominence, privilege, power or prestige. Rather, Jesus emptied himself so he could be a humble, sacrificial servant; thus, revealing the nature of God. Jesus answers the human question, ‘What kind of God is this?’ by living as a compassionate servant among us. Jesus reveals God as the kind of God who is humble; One who suffers because of us, for us and with us. What kind of God is this? This humble God suffers with humanity to heal, reconcile, transform and redeem.

Jesus reveals God to be humble and sacrificial; never manipulative or domineering.

Jesus came into a world that thought God was unapproachable, unpredictable and unknowable.

Jesus came into a world that thought God was completely detached from human experience.

Jesus reveals God as One who humbles God's Self to love and serve humanity sacrificially.

Jesus reveals God to be One who is relational and Self-giving; not authoritarian or dictatorial.

Jesus reveals God as One who is with us even amidst our suffering.

Jesus reveals God as One who calls people into a relationship empowering them to be wounded healers.

Jesus reveals God as One who is a humble servant in relationship with a humble servant people.

Because of Jesus, we see that humanity reveals the God of Jesus as we serve one another in humility.

A few years ago, I stood in the pulpit of a church in Fez, Morocco. The congregation consisted of Christian from 23 nations speaking 9 languages. The pastor referred to them as 'Dislocated Peoples.' But, like the early Church, they shared two experiences: being scattered and sharing the Mind of Christ. So, on that Sunday, we gathered around the Mind of Christ and the Lord's Table.

Today, once again, we gather around this familiar Communion Table prepared for us.

In broken pieces of bread and in the fruit of the vine, Jesus reveals God to us.

Beloved, this bread and this cup show us that we serve a God of humility.

Communion is both our oldest practice and most sacred communal experience in the tradition of following Jesus.

Jesus instituted this meal on Passover; a Holy Day reminding God's people of God's salvation.

Jesus challenges us to 'Remember' him whenever we gather around this table; So, we remember humble Jesus.

Jesus shows us humility emerging from a life committed to incarnating God's vision.

The humility Jesus shows us on the cross is not a humility that cowers in fear or is ever in subjugation to power.

Jesus offers us a humility secure in God's faithfulness; the kind of humility that transforms human lives.

Mark tells us that Jesus instituted this meal by sending his disciples to ask, "Where is my guest room...?"

In Jesus, God always appears in our midst as a humble Guest asking, "have you made room for me?"

In this bread and cup, we remember Jesus, who offers himself to us as a guest at this table; he is guest and host.

In this bread and cup, we remember Jesus, who reveals to us 'What Kind of God This Is.'

Beloved, the world has many forces of fragmentation; boasters, braggards and people who exalt themselves.

As you eat this bread and drink this cup, I invite you to renew your commitment to follow Jesus as a disciple.

As you express your commitment of discipleship, you will reveal the humble God revealed in Jesus.

The God who makes us one is revealed in broken pieces of bread and in the fruit of the vine poured out for you.

Let us reveal to others the humble God of Jesus in a world addicted to lesser gods of aggression and arrogance.

WHAT KIND OF GOD IS THIS? This is the kind of God who transforms creation through humility.

Welcome to The Lord's Table, a table prepared for you by The Humble God who calls you to humility.

Amen and AMEN!