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Philippians 2:5-11
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Filling our Hearts with our Neighbor

Good morning church. The good news is that God loves you and calls on you to love your neighbor. But how shall we show our love?

Prayer. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing to you. Our rock and our salvation.

The Cross is a scandalizing object. A paradox where the greatest act of weakness, the time of death is also a mark of the greatest strength, declaring that God's love is the greatest force in the universe. The painting behind me may be making a few of you uncomfortable, an image of a dying man seems the antithesis of God is love. And I think that is the whole point, the coming together of irreconcilable opposites, was at the center of Jesus's mission. The "King" born to peasants, the "good" "samaritan," the "turned away" "young ruler," the Jesus that is both "slaughtered lamb" and "Shepard."

Jesus breaths in the hurt of the world, but still preaches love.

In today's scripture Jesus is both, God and a human slave. Not because of a tragedy, but because of Christ's own choice to love his neighbor. Jesus reaches down to humanity and gathers a community around him. Jesus does not raise an army, but a crowd of friends. A story you would not hear in one of those suspicious get rich quick schemes. The cross is shocking, but it proves how far Jesus will go for love's sake.

But why is Paul even bringing this up? Paul has a problem, the church in Philippi is not as "united" as Paul would liked and are acting out of selfish ambition, or rather I should say that people we looking out for themselves. I'd like to tell the generous story. These church folks were acting like many humans do, worrying about things like security, (how do I keep myself safe from this unpredictable world). And in their society, like many others the way to do this by accumulating wealth and property. Plus, in the ancient world a rich person would show their wealth by having many clients who would join them for their morning business around the city, these client relationships could last for years or even generations. And I wonder what it

was be like to say that we are all one in Christ, brothers and sisters, while having both patrons and clients, owners and slaves all in the same church. It is awkward enough to be in the same church as your supervisor, but imagine having to deal with being told in you are one in christ on Sunday, and on Monday depending on another church member for your daily bread.

Do we fight over the air we breathe, or do we share the same breath of God?

So how does Paul deal with this dichotomy of how the church is and where he wants the church to go? He tells the counter-cultural, anti-emperial story of how Jesus did not reach up to power to gain his status and security, but instead Christ reached down. He reached down from the heavens to make a life here among humanity. Where he ate with tax collectors, prostitutes and sinners, Where he proclaimed the kingdom of God for the lowly and woe to the powerful. This reminds me a lot of the parable of the shrewd manager, who once he figured out that his precarious middle class status was threatened, he started writing off debts in an attempt to gain hospitality with the lowly.

Jesus gave his breathe to many, so that we all may live.

Paul and Jesus call us to the importance of our neighbors, of reaching down not to grasp the security from amassing material wealth, but instead to find our security from the people in the church. If we lose our jobs or homes, we do not only have our emergency fund, but also our emergency hosts who take us in and get us back on our feet again. After all, Jesus was a homeless rabbi beggar, he could teach the Word in exchange for a hot meal and a place to sleep. His ministry was funded not from his family's lucrative fishing fleet, but the generosity of a few wealthy women. And so Paul says to the philippians, do not reach up and lord your power over people, but realize that our power is with our neighbors. Our power is made up for the relationships that we have with one another. Our power is in the congregatoin.

We are most powerful when we breathe with one another.

I've seen this be true in this congregation that has done so much for one another. But on this passion Sunday, I encourage you to think about how we may continue on this journey through the wilderness to the kingdom of God.

How do we transform this church from having one service that is always the patrons, and another the clients? Instead, how do we all become interdependent on one another? This week I've got Desmond Tutu in my head, "we've got to stop pulling people out of the river, and figure out why they are falling in in the first place" Loving people is not just an interpersonal helping someone out when they are in trouble, its about changing the math so that a single sickness or mistake sends them into crisis.

I'll end with the exersize that I spoke about in my mid-week meditation. Take a big breath in. and breath out. Paying attention to our breathing is a way to contemplate and think deeply. Breathe in... and out... Now when we breathe in together, I want you to fill your lungs not only with air, but with good things, like hope, peace, and love. Breathe in... and out. Now when you breathe out, I want you to breathe out negative things, like your worries and fears. Breathe in... and out. Breathe in the peace of God, Breathe out our selfish ambition. Now. as I read today's passage, I do not think that we are breathing in and out for ourselves, but we are reaching across, reaching across to grasp the hand of our neighbor. Because our power should come from our neighbor, not our own status. So now when you breath in, think about what your neighbor needs and breathe out things that are hurting your neighbor. Breath in... and out... Breath in... and out...Breath in God's love for all, breathe out the politics of hate.

Let us breathe in together and fill our hearts with our neighbors Amen.