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Philippians 2:1-11
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Get ye on the cross

Good morning church. I've got to warn you, I've had a difficult day of work this week. Maybe my worst week since you called me here in November 2019. I had a difficult conversation with PIM leadership, felt a whirlwind of emotion around if I was up to the challenge of shepherding this church through LGBTQ inclusion, and wrote a taxing article for the Leader. I do not say this because I want your pity, because I am doing quite well today. I say this because my frustration is going to come out in this sermon and I need each and every one of you to know that I love you and everyone else in this church. I want to do what is best for all people because I am at heart a people pleaser. But sometimes, I just need to share what I really think.

Please pray with me. Lord, calm my heart so I can speak your gospel, calm the hearts of your people so that they can hear your voice, walk with us through the difficult road to peace where all people are loved, respected, and grow ever closer to you. Amen.

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Growing up I've always been told that I should be like Jesus. That following Jesus would come with sacrifice, require obedience, and necessitate humility. I was taught that imitating Christ is the highest form of worship. Like many of you, being Christian means being the quiet in the land. Be humble. On face value, I must agree. I come from a stable family where I never was hungry. My pasty white skin has never gotten in the way of my success when I applied for school and jobs. My X and Y chromosomes mean that people tend to listen to what I say and take me seriously. I grew up with citizenship in the most militarily powerful country in the world. In most of my identities I am privileged, and so like the privileged Philippians I am called to imitate Christ, to humble myself. Because I am human, the same as you, and you, and you. In the eyes of God I am no greater than any of you. But in the eyes of society I am given the benefit of the doubt.

This is how I always understood this passage. A call for my own humility. As a call to get ye on the cross.

And why do the Philippians need to hear this?

The Church in Philippi has a selfish ambition problem. Last week I spoke about how the church in Philippi is a Roman colony, a place where veterans got land and Roman culture reigned. In Roman culture, selfish ambition is not a vice, in fact, Romans probably saw it as a virtue.

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Wealthy Romans poured money into building austentatious villas, bribing voters for political careers, and funding public works in their honor. But perhaps the greatest form of selfish ambition in Roman life was the patron client system, where every morning clients would come to the home of their patron, maybe they would receive a few coins or a meal and would follow their patron around as they did their daily pubic duties. The bigger the group of clients you had, the more important you were. And maybe you can start to imagine why the people of Philippi had a problem with selfish ambition. Imagine with me having a church where the wealthy patrons called all the shots, because thats what they were used to. And so Paul gives the example of Christ, someone who defeated death and fought for liberation by dying in the most shameful manor possible, on a roman cross. Paul is talking to the patrons of his church when he tells them, do not think you are any better than your clients. If this Jesus movement is going to work, you have to consider the interests of others. We all have to be in this together. Get ye on the cross, means that we all equal in the eyes of Christ.

And so this leads us to the Christ hymn. Perhaps written by Paul or perhaps something out of the hymnbook. Christ emptied himself. But why? Why did Christ take the form of the slave and humble himself?

I am reminded of the Mark 3 passage I preached on a few Sundays ago, where Jesus pronounces that his family is not his flesh and blood, but the prostitutes, tax collectors, samaritans, and outcats that surrounded him. And I am left to think that Jesus humbled himself, not because humility is not a universal virtue, but something he did for others. Let me say this again, Jesus humbled himself for the outcasts who called him Rabbi and brother. Jesus lowered himself so that he could walk in solidarity with their struggles, feel their pain, fight for their liberation and inclusion in Jewish religious life.

And so why then do well-meaning Christians keep telling people to get ye on the cross.

Name almost any social justice movement in living memory and you will find people saying that those folks should be humble. I am reminded by Martin Luther King Jr's Letter from a Birminghnam Jail wher he responds to calls from moderates to wait for the right time. Be humble, get ye on the cross. I can see this when women were called prideful when they want to be preachers, be humble get ye on the cross. Or when queer\folks want to come out of the closet and live their truth. Be humble get ye on the cross.

I can understand that the church in Phillipi needed to hear that they should be humble. I can understand how a few of us could stand to be a little more humble.

But we run into problems when we tell other people to be humble. Jesus did not humble himself because humility is always appropriate, but because he was powerful and his humility would

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serve the prostitutes, tax collectors, and outcasts that he called family. But, let us not say to our undocumented brothers and sisters, be humble, do not demand your citizenship, get ye on the cross. Let us not say to our queer sibilings that justice can wait another five years. Be humble, do not demand to be treated as beloved children of God in the church, get ye on the cross.

The calls for justice shall not wait. The call to treat everyone as beloved children of God shall not wait. You all know that I love you all. And as your pastor I hope that would put my life on the line to protect you. I hope that I understand what it means to be ready to get on the cross. But I would never demand it of any of you. Please. Please. Please. Do not ask the outcasts of our society to sacrifice. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

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