

**Let us take a moment to pray before we think about God's Word.**

**Come Holy Spirit, reveal Jesus to us. Come Holy Spirit, lead us as followers of Jesus. Come, Holy Spirit, come.**

**Amen.**

**Today marks two years** since I was inducted as your minister here in Brightons Parish Church, and from my perspective at least it's been a good two years, I have thoroughly enjoyed getting to know you and serving alongside you as we seek to fulfil our purpose of 'inviting, encouraging and enabling all ages to follow Jesus Christ'. Who could have imagined these last two years? Who could have imagined what was on the horizon though?

**I think it was the first Sunday** I preached that I brought along this box – do you remember? On that day, we spoke about the labels we might use to describe Jesus – both His names as well as His character, and our boys and girls helped with that in the Young People’s message. But the key point of the box was that we all put Jesus in a box – we all think we know Jesus, we think we know what He’s like. But often our understanding of Jesus and so how we relate to Jesus, puts Him in a box – it confines Jesus, and maybe that box doesn’t even represent who He truly is or what He is like. More often than not, I think, we create a mental picture of Jesus, or we have certain expectations of Jesus, which are based upon popular ideas in our culture rather than on the truth. And in part, that’s another motivation to get into our 2021 reading plan, that we might all get to know a bit more of the real Jesus.

**In our passage today,** Paul wants to help the Philippians get to know more of the real Jesus. This portion follows on from what we covered last week, so there will be echoes of that. We saw last Sunday **that Paul wrote:** ‘Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ...’ (1:27) and then he went on to explain that part of being worthy is having unity and trust, and he based his argument on what Christians have already received through Jesus and who they are in Jesus, as people who are in Christ.

Today, Paul continues his theme but with a different argument. **He says,** ‘In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus...’ (2:5) Paul is about to get very personal, focusing in on the person of Jesus, helping these dear Christians to grasp...

more of the real Jesus so that they might share, emulate, the mindset of Jesus in their relationships.

**Now, Paul is writing** to people in a time and culture where the popular understanding of the gods was that these beings held great privilege, great power and glory, and they exercised this for their own agendas and their own reputation. We see this in many of the gods and goddesses of Greek mythology: the power and privilege they held could be used in whatever manner they wished, even to the detriment of humanity. That was the common assumption, the popular understanding of what it meant to be a god, what it meant to be divine.

Into that culture, into that popular **understanding, Paul says:**

**‘...have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:**

**who, being in very nature God,**

**did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage...’ (2:5-6)**

**Notice that Paul is saying Jesus is God, that Jesus is much more than a prophet, a good man, a fine example or even simply an idea. **We live in a time** when many think that it’s OK to box in Jesus to one of these categories, to think that He is a mere man, or a cute, religious sage. But the testimony of the Church, the teaching of Scripture, is that Jesus is God, He alone is God and has always been God. Yet as God, He would not allow Himself to be boxed into the popular understanding of the time, for as God Jesus displayed His deity in ways that were completely opposite to everything that was expected. **Paul says:****

**‘[Jesus] did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage...’ – His rank, His privilege, His rights as God would have allowed, should have ensured, that He could dominate His creation, these creatures who had rejected Him and made a mess of His world. But Jesus chose not to exploit, not to keep hold, of what was truly and rightly His, and instead He made another choice, a choice to display His divinity in a truly unexpected and quite frankly – offensive – manner, for**

**Paul goes on:**

**‘rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.**

**And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!’ (2:7-8)**

**Jesus made Himself nothing; He humbled Himself – Jesus chose, He willing chose a different path, He chose the way of unselfish giving, the way of humble service and obedience. He chose to show His deity, not in power and privilege, but with shame and weakness. Jesus did this by becoming a man, He took on human likeness, and then as a man, He obeyed His Father’s will such that Jesus chose to die, and to die the worst of deaths, death by crucifixion, the most vilified of ways to die.**

**Now, there are a few things I need to unpack for us here. In our translation today it says that Jesus ‘made himself nothing’, yet you’ll see in other translations that it speaks of Jesus emptying Himself. Technically, ‘emptying’ is a more literal translation of the Greek words, but it has led to wrong thinking about this passage –**

people have misunderstood this literal phrase to mean that Jesus emptied Himself of divine power or other divine attributes. But, the Greek word is used throughout the New Testament in metaphorical ways, speaking figuratively about emptying, where something is deprived of its proper place or use. So, what the newer NIV translation does, is paraphrase it very slightly so that we don't make that wrong assumption and can then get to the heart of the issue: Jesus is God, He remained God entirely, and as God He surrendered His rights and privileges; He did not empty Himself in any other way.

**But let's grasp what this means:** the God of all creation chose, for the sake of the world, the way of sacrifice, the way of self-giving love. We take that for granted, I think, we almost expect that this should be the case –



**but I wonder if you would sacrifice yourself in such a way?**

**Would you give yourself** for someone on death row, for example? Would you give up security, comfort, peace, and allow, say, a far-right fundamentalist group to govern our nation and so our lives? Because in coming a man, Jesus gave up security and comfort, and allowed humanity to put Him to death, a humanity who rightly should be judged by God, rather than judging God.

What is more, this very God, **Jesus Christ, chose death** – death had no power against Jesus, because God is immortal, and He alone is immortal. Yet, God, Jesus, subjected His immortality to death, holding nothing back and giving up everything, for love of you and love of me. **Jesus said,** ‘The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life... No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down...’ (John 10:17-18)



**And why did He do it? Again, Jesus says:**

**‘For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.’ (John 3:16)**

**In love for us, God gave Himself to die in our place. He didn’t have to, He might have conformed to the popular understanding of the gods – but for our sake, He did not consider His position, rights or privilege to be for His own agenda, or for His own benefit or safety, rather, He humbled Himself and loved us unto death. This is the mindset of Jesus, and Paul calls us to adopt, to grow in, this same mindset as people who claim to follow Jesus.**

**As I reflect on this, I'm struck by the recent news that there are churches and Christian organisations who are seeking in the courts to have the right to worship in our buildings amidst the pandemic. They are pushing back against the Scottish Government's recent restrictions, and whilst I appreciate their argument that churches have not YET been a source of spreading the virus, I do have to question whether their undertaking, and appeal to their rights, is in line with the Saviour we are called to emulate: He gave up His rights for others. So, I doubt you'll be finding my name added to such an appeal.**

**But let's also get personal about this, and not simply critique the choices of others – what about us? We are called to love, to be humble, to be united, and to give ourselves for the other. Is this our, your, mindset?...**

**Do people see such humility and compassion in us? Is being part of church about what you can get, or have you yet found a way to give, and so love others?**

**Maybe it could be through your pastoral grouping; maybe it's joining the Thursday live prayer time and praying for others; maybe it's getting your family involved with the intergenerational penpals idea that our Sunday School and Pastoral Care teams are setting up; maybe it's offering your abilities, your gifts, and getting involved – for example, we need more volunteers to help with our Boys Brigade sections, could you get involved there? For more information on any of these ideas, please get in touch because we're all called to follow the example of Jesus and give our lives away for others.**

**Yet, not only are we to follow the example of Jesus, we are called to worship Jesus because of His example. Paul goes on to say:**

**‘Therefore God exalted [Jesus] to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.’ (2:9-11)**

**One day every knee will rightly bow in worship to Jesus. We will all come to see that He is Lord, ‘the Lord’, and this is the name which Paul speaks of. ‘Jesus’ was the name given at His birth, yet the name, the title, of ‘Lord’, was given after His death, resurrection and ascension into heaven. That name, ‘Lord’, confirms Jesus as God of all**

creation but it was received by Jesus not by right or seizure, but by His humiliation and self-giving love.

**I wonder friends, have** you chosen yet to bow the knee in worship of Jesus? Can you see in His incarnation as a human being, and then in His death on the cross, can you see the depth of His love for you? Can you see the wonder of God? Can you see how worthy He is of worship and glory and adoration? Are you giving Him that yet, friends? Are you giving Him your worship? Have you bent the knee to Him in your own life? Now, I don't mean are you just turning up to church and switching on the TV: our true worship is seen in how we live, in the choices we make, and in whether we are committed to Him, trusting of Him, come what may.

**Please don't let your hearts stay hard or distanced or cold towards God; let the box you have Him in be changed, let it be blown apart even, by how He has revealed... Himself in Jesus. This is no cute Sunday School story folks – this is the real Jesus and He really did love you to the point of death, and my question is: do you know Him? Are you following Him? Have you bent the knee to Jesus, and will you let Him reign in your life, such that His love, His self-giving love, will be seen in you and through you?**

**So, once more, like last week, let us have a moment to pray. I'm going to give an opportunity for anyone to bend the knee to Jesus, maybe for the first time, and welcome Him into your life. Then, there will be a prayer to invite the Spirit to fill us that we might show the love of Jesus to one another and in our community. So, let us pray.**



**Lord Jesus, we see in Your life and in Your death such a powerful example of true love, and we are not worthy of it Lord and yet You still gave it for love of us because You thought we were worth it. You gave yourself and Lord, in light of that love, we want to bow the knee today. Maybe there's some who want to bow the knee for the first time and welcome Jesus into your life, so pray along with me now. Pray out loud if you can.**

**Lord Jesus I don't deserve Your love but thank you for loving me to death. Please forgive me. Forgive me for the wrong choices in my life. You might want to name a few things in the stillness just now.**

**Lord I turn from these and I open up myself, my heart, my life to You.**

**Thank you for Your offer of forgiveness. I receive that forgiveness now and ask for Your Spirit to fill me. Please come into my life and lead me in Your ways.**

**Thank you lord Jesus.**

**Maybe for the rest of us, we need to choose afresh to bow the knee. You might even be so bold as maybe just to get down at home on your knee and welcome Him into your life, but if that's not possible or not for you yet, maybe even just hold out your hands as a physical way of welcome.**

**Lord Jesus, come into our lives afresh. We bend the knee. Help us to give up our agenda, to pursue Your agenda, to love God and love neighbor, to make You known and to follow in Your ways.**

**Oh Lord, forgive us and show us how we should follow after You.**

**Lord, we want to be a shining beacon of light for You in our community and in our time. How unable we are to do that on our own strength. Lord, every day we're faced with with temptations to go other ways and if it is**

**for anything but Your Spirit we would choose those and we often do choose those. We turn a deaf ear to the Spirit. So, we ask for a fresh filling of Your Spirit now. Come and fill us afresh.**

**Come give us power to choose Your way over the ways we would normally choose. Lord, I pray too, by Your Spirit, You would give us a fresh understanding of Your love, that this would be more than words on a page, that Your Love would be poured out into our hearts by the Spirit, that Your love would be so real and tangible that it would overflow from us and to others, into the lives of others and into the life of our community.**

**Thank you Lord. for the gift of your Spirit**

**We offer ourselves in Your service and for Your glory,  
Amen**