

Philippians 2:1-13 18th Sunday after Pentecost September 29, 1996

*If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, 2make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. 4Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. 5Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, 6who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, 7but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, 8he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. 9Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, 10so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

*12Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*

Cleveland has said goodbye to the stadium. My father took me there, I took my children there. I wasn't there last weekend, or early in the week for the auction. But the publicity did stir up some memories.

I learned what it was like to be in a crowd there. I lived on a farm, went to school in a small town, but when the Milan rotary sponsored a trip to the Indians game, there I was part of a great mass of people. I learned that in a crowd, it is best to go with the flow. Those ahead keep me from moving faster, those behind push me along.

Put yourself there, in a large crowd moving along. Feel yourself pushed, carried swept along.

Now imagine another scene - a crowd moving and you trying to go the other way. See yourself moving out to the edges, fighting for a way through, progress slow, or not moving at all. Always there is the pressure to reverse your course and be swept along with all the rest.

In the days when I first went down to the stadium, back in the fifties, on Sunday mornings the crowds were sweeping people into the churches. When I was in elementary school most everyone was sending their children to Sunday school. "Which church do you go to?" was the question I could ask my classmates.

Being good citizens, doing our fair share, trying to help others through the work we would choose, these were all part of moving in the direction the crowd was going.

But now, forty years later, the crowd is flowing in a different direction. Now many homes on your street are sleepy places on Sunday mornings or are busily preparing for a day's recreation rather than a morning's worship. Instead of doing our fair share, getting our fair share and some of our neighbor's share is where the crowd is heading. Our work is for getting ahead, no longer about helping others. As we go with the flow Albert Belle and Art Modell are more like us than we would like to admit. You've got to watch out for yourself we would teach our children, because the crowd is stampeding and we don't want them to be trampled.

So visualize a great crowd coming toward you as you hear these words from Paul and from God that send you against the flow.

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourself. Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others.”

We live in the days of self-promotion. But God says: do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit.

We live in the days where at work you had better be looking out for yourself or you will be run over, but God says: Look not to your own interests but to the interests of others.

Is it any wonder that I am tempted to have a church way of acting, and a world way of acting - a church way of thinking and a world way of thinking - two realities, two worlds, two lives.

But Jesus is one Lord over all.

He is not willing to be put on the shelf as I go with the flow out there and only walk with him here in this place.

For Jesus did not go with the flow.

While everyone is trying to climb up to a higher and higher place, Jesus “who was in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.”

You and I would give anything to be like God, to have power and wisdom and glory so that others would fall down and worship, but Jesus out of love for you emptied himself. He emptied himself of all the power and glory and wisdom, to take on the weakness and neediness of a baby, subject to stomach aches, and viruses and hunger. All the neediness and weakness that we sacrifice our lives to escape, he freely chose for you.

And death.

For you.

Not that quick die in your sleep death that all of us say we'd like to have when our time comes but a slow and shame filled death, mocked, ridiculed, death on the cross Jesus suffered for you.

And what did Jesus get out of it all?

“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 Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.”

The self-promoters and the glory seekers were not raised to honor by God, but Jesus the humble one, the crucified one. God's will is that every knee should bend, every tongue should confess Jesus as Lord. Imagine that crowd pouring out praise to him, all in heaven and on earth and under the earth, all that have ever lived or have ever been bowed down in worship of Jesus. This is the ending God is writing.

The crowd is going the wrong way, and God has appointed you to go against the flow. Just as God is appointing Ericka this morning as she is baptized. God has chosen you to be a people whose knees and whose lives are bowed down in worship of Jesus already. Regarding others as better than yourselves, looking not to your own interests but to the interests of others, you are a sign pointing to Jesus.

A long time ago we did not know that following Jesus would mean going against the flow. But it does. Now Paul invites you to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. Pick your way through that crowd that threatens to turn you around and claim you with fear and trembling. This is very difficult.

But no sooner has Paul spoken of working out your own salvation with fear and trembling than he speaks this promise: “for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”

You are going against the flow; it will take all that you can give to do it. But do not be afraid, God is at work in you. Remember how God wants everything to end.

“At the name of Jesus every knee should bow 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.”