

The Humble Path to Unity

By Linda Rex

April 2, 2023, Palm or Passion Sunday—This season of reflection before the events of Holy Week has been an opportunity for us to go deeper in our walk with Christ. The challenges we have faced, whether health concerns, financial and work concerns, or relationship issues, have reminded us of our need for Christ. Perhaps we have ignored this cry of our hearts, or hopefully, we have tuned into it in such a way that we have allowed it to move us deeper into our walk with the Lord.

On this Palm Sunday, we are reminded of Jesus' triumphant arrival in the city of Jerusalem along with the other pilgrims celebrating the spring Jewish festival season. Christ arrived, seated on a symbol of humility, in fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9, as the long-anticipated Messiah (Matthew 21:1–11). The important question asked of these pilgrims was, "Who is this?"—the very question each of us needs to come to terms with. Who Jesus Christ is matters, for this is fundamental to the reason he came to earth, and why he ended up where he ended up—crucified.

The apostle Paul in Philippians 2:5–11, tells us something fundamental about Jesus' identity. Dealing with issues of disunity within that congregation, he points out their need to begin to live in accordance with the truth of who they were in Christ. The fellowship of the Spirit, unity within the body of Christ, is only possible when we each are living and walking in true humility.

Paul then begins to describe what real humility looks like. Christ, as the Son of God, did not cling to the privileges of his divinity, but rather set them aside temporarily in order to join us in our humanity. Taking on our human flesh, Jesus experienced our real human life with all its temptations and struggles, yet remained sinless. Going on beyond this, Christ surrendered himself to be crucified—a death which was utterly humiliating for the Jewish people of that day and total foolishness for the Greeks. What humans deemed shameful and degrading was what Jesus Christ embraced, for our sakes—to free us from evil, sin, and death.

Paul goes on to say that the result of Jesus' utter humility was that his Father exalted him to reign over all. One day each and every living creature, human or spirit, will bow to Christ, for the glory of the Father. Paul's point was that humility is the path, not just to glory, but to true unity. If we want to have a true participation in the divine union and communion, it requires the price of humility. We are called to grow up in Christ, by the Spirit to put on his own humility, so that we will live together with one another in oneness and unity.

This makes me wonder whether we have been asking ourselves the correct questions when it comes to what we are struggling with in our world today. How often are our politicians actually willing to take the place of humility and shame for the sake of others? How willing are we as followers of Christ willing to own up to our failures and weaknesses, allowing others to see that we are as dependent upon the grace of God as everyone else? Are those of us who do business willing to do the hard thing and serve others rather than seek our own glory and success?

These are hard questions. It's impossible to live in this world and do these things the way Jesus did, though the Savior said nothing is impossible for God. Perhaps this Palm Sunday, as we walk the streets with Jesus in his triumphant entrance into Jerusalem, we might contemplate his real purpose for entering the city—to assure our redemption and transformation at the price of his own loss of life and dignity because of God's heart of love and forgiveness toward us. In realizing and confessing our need, we may by the Spirit receive Christ's heart of humility and service so that we will live in unity with others.

Thank you, Father, for sending your Son for our salvation. Thank you, Jesus, for being willing to humble yourself so completely for our sakes. Heavenly Spirit, grant us truly humble hearts and minds that we might live in true unity with one another, through Jesus our Lord. Amen.

“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus ‘every knee will bow’, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Philippians 2:5–11 NASB