

We meet separately but joined together by our love of God and our desire to learn about him and live in his way. So come, as you are, to worship God.

Singing the Faith 317

At the name of Jesus
every knee shall bow,
every tongue confess him
King of Glory now.

'Tis the Father's pleasure
we should call him Lord,
who from the beginning
was the mighty Word.

Humbled for a season,
to receive a name
from the lips of sinners
unto whom he came,
faithfully he bore it
spotless to the last,
brought it back victorious
when from death he passed:

Bore it up triumphant
with its human light,
through all ranks of creatures
to the central height,
to the throne of Godhead,
to the Father's breast;
filled it with the glory
of that perfect rest.

In your hearts enthrone him;
there let him subdue
all that is not holy,
all that is not true;
crown him as your captain
in temptation's hour:
let his will enfold you
in its light and power.

For this same Lord Jesus
shall return again,
with his Father's glory,
with his angel train;
all the wreaths of empire
meet upon his brow,
and our hearts confess him
King of Glory now.

Caroline Maria Noel (1817–1877)

PRAYERS

**At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,
every tongue confess him king of glory now.**

Lord God, you know each one of us through and through.
Our deepest feelings are transparent to your gaze.
In Jesus, you confront our pride and arrogance,
we are shamed and resent you.

**At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,
every tongue confess him king of glory now.**

Lord Jesus Christ, in your meekness we see strength under control.
Through you we sense the power of God harnessed in love.
In you we see self-discipline, self-assurance, yet you are not self-centred.
We are astonished, and unsettled, unsure of what this means, afraid to change.

**At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,
every tongue confess him king of glory now.**

Holy Spirit, you percolate through all we do in Christ's name.
In you we sense the meekness that is mighty and majestic,
the outpouring of power and love that alone can master our sinful ways.
We are filled with awe and admiration, comforted, encouraged, yet strangely disturbed.
**At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,
every tongue confess him king of glory now.**

God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Lord, God and King,
inspire us, we pray, by the leading of your word,
to seek to do your will,
to love as you have loved,
to master our self-will and, repenting of our former pride,
to serve you joyfully and well all the days of our life.
We ask it in the name of Jesus confident that
**at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,
every tongue confess him king of glory now.**

Loving and merciful God,
we bring you our grateful thanks that you are one who forgives, and who, in Jesus, shows us how that
forgiveness is effective in human lives.
As we reflect on our inner motivation and secret thoughts, grant us your forgiveness.

When we have done something, however worthy, because it reflects to our glory,
or have acted in ways which have exalted us at the expense of others,
Christ, have mercy upon us;
Lord, have mercy upon us.

When we have said something which has belittled others or made them look foolish,
or pushed someone out of the way so we could gain an advantage,
Christ, have mercy upon us;
Lord, have mercy upon us.

When we have acted arrogantly and selfishly, as if we were the only ones that mattered,
when we have, in effect, put ourselves in the place which is yours alone,
Christ, have mercy upon us;
Lord, have mercy upon us.

Loving and merciful God,
grant that we might seek to know the mind that was in Christ Jesus, enable us to show the humility he had
in his life as our natural bearing, and give us the strength to be willing to be the servant of all, for Jesus'
sake.
Amen.

PHILIPPI

Philippi is a UNESCO World Heritage Site in North Macedonia. It was originally a Greek city which was re-founded by the Romans after the Battle of Philippi in 42BC. It was home to a large number of Roman veterans but also Macedonian Greeks and some Jews. Around the time that Paul wrote his letter Philippi had been extensively remodelled and was considered to be a 'miniature Rome'. Its citizens could buy and sell property and were exempt from land tax and the poll tax. They were also entitled to protection under Roman law.

Like many cities in the Roman Empire there was a high rate of infant and child mortality and life expectancy was just 25-30 years. However, it was a prosperous city where many households owned

slaves. There is evidence that some women were socially and economically active and some led households. Indeed, Paul's first convert is a dealer in purple cloth, named Lydia.

The good trade routes in the Roman Empire probably meant that the story of Jesus reached Philippi some time before Paul's visit but it is the first place in Europe where Paul preached the gospel. He may have founded the church there. The letter shows that Paul knows the Philippians well and is very fond of them.

This is how it all began...

ACTS 16 : 9 – 15

Prevented by the Holy Spirit (*Heaven and Charing Cross p39*)

PHILIPPIANS 2 : 1 – 13

Singing the Faith 362

Meekness and majesty, manhood and deity,
in perfect harmony the man who is God.
Lord of eternity, dwells in humanity,
kneels in humility and washes our feet.

*Oh, what a mystery - meekness and majesty:
bow down and worship,
for this is your God, this is your God!*

Father's pure radiance, perfect in innocence,
yet learns obedience to death on a cross:

suffering to give us life,
conquering through sacrifice —
and as they crucify, prays, 'Father forgive.'

Wisdom unsearchable, God the invisible,
love indestructible in frailty appears:
Lord of infinity, stooping so tenderly,
lifts our humanity
to the heights of his throne.

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950) CCL167911

SERMON

The authorship of many of Paul's letters is disputed but the letter to the Philippians is generally regarded as written by Paul himself. It is written from prison. It's not certain which of Paul's spells in prison this is. There are compelling reasons both for & against suggesting Rome, Ephesus or Caesarea. Wherever he is, Paul seems to be facing the possibility of a death sentence. A result he would accept readily to be united with Christ. However, he feels there is still work for him to do & knows that to live is to be in Christ. He plans to visit the Philippians again to help them on their journey.

Unfortunately it seems that all is not going well in Philippi. Chapter 1 ends with Paul advising: "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come & see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, & not frightened in anything by your opponents." (*Philippians 1:27 RSV*)

It's not clear who these opponents are but maybe there are some clues in chapter 2. Paul urges them to do nothing from selfishness or conceit. Were there those among them or around them that were looking only after number one, insisting that everyone else did things their way?

It's possible that the section describing Jesus is a hymn already in use in the early church which Paul chooses to quote to support his argument. The language is certainly very poetic & unlike Paul's usual language. Many translations present it in poetic form rather than prose. How is Philippians 2:6-11 displayed in your Bible?

The passage says nothing of Jesus' life & ministry, leading some people to think that Paul knew very little about the actual work of Jesus on earth. Rather it describes Jesus' journey from being God to becoming human. For many this is seen as Paul's belief in the pre-existence of Christ. He comes from God into humanity. It is very clear that this is a downward journey. Interestingly Christ is listed as becoming a servant or slave before it says he became human but the downward shift doesn't stop there. Still he humbled himself & died in a way reserved for the lowest of the low on a cross.

Think of the story of Jesus: his birth in a manger, born into a poor family. He probably started out as a jobbing carpenter but gave up the security of that to go out on the road. He called people to give up their jobs, their status & follow him. Just before he died he took a towel & a bowl & knelt & washed his disciples' feet. And he died on a cross, hanging between two criminals. Elsewhere Paul calls this the folly of the cross.

Think of the situation in Philippi. Many people were highly successful, slave owners. Here was this little church with its physical founder languishing in jail & its spiritual founder not only just an ordinary man but essentially a slave, dying an ignominious death. What sort of religion would be built upon foundations like that?

Interestingly the hymn doesn't mention the resurrection explicitly but the downward thrust of the journey ends on the cross. From here God lifts him up. There are clear links with Isaiah's Suffering Servant. A model Jesus probably drew on. "Behold my servant shall prosper, he shall be exalted & lifted up & shall be very high." (*Isaiah 52:13 RSV*) We see Christ not merely as a slave in the Graeco-Roman meaning of the word but as the royal Son & Servant of the divine King living & dying in obedience. The upward turn, the exaltation, is not a reward but God's acceptance of Christ's self-offering.

Christ's suffering is linked to his glorification. Paul is reminding the Philippians that they suffer in Christ. He assures them that whatever they have to suffer now Christ is leading them to glory.

And what about us? What does it say to us? Look at the church. Think about your local church or the churches in Bath or the Methodist Church nationally. We do not always see eye to eye. We disagree on all sorts of things. Not just the colour of the walls or the contents of the hymnbook but things that go much deeper. What does it mean to be the church in this time & place? How do we love our neighbour? The issue of human relationships & particularly same-sex marriage threatens to split the church. Certainly it is causing distrust & suffering to many people.

"If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship in the Spirit, if any tenderness & compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit & purpose....Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus." (*Philippians 2:1-2,5 NIV*)

This doesn't mean that we have to agree all the time, heaven forbid! But we have to respect each other & our beliefs. We have to act in a way that builds us up as a community. We have to be one in Christ.

It's hard for us too. We live in a celebrity culture. We see famous people staring at us from the covers of glamour magazines, on YouTube & on twitter. People want to be seen & listened to, to be somebody, to get promotion, to win the award, to make the earth-shattering discovery. It's hard for us to look not only to our own interests but also to the interests of others. But that's what it means to live in the way of Jesus, to have the mind of Christ.

"Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself..." (*Philippians 2:5-6 RSV*)

If you are to have the mind of Christ what do you need to empty yourself of? And what are you going to fill yourself with in its place?

I am reminded of the words Alan Dale uses to describe Jesus: "These were the marks of his character. He cared for people – for everybody. He was a very happy man. People who couldn't get on with one another found it possible to be friends in his presence. He never gave up. He was very kind, a really good man, & he could always be relied on. He was gentle, yet master of himself. What people remembered about him was his 'graciousness'. (*New World p247*)

And if we can live like that then God is at work in us, individually & collectively, willing & acting according to his good purpose.

Today, Lord, I got on my high horse.
I knew what was right.
I knew what was best.
I was absolutely convinced that none knew better.
I am like this all the time.
I am like it in the way I worship you.
I am like it when I sit in meetings.
I am like it watching the news.
I am like it with people
who are younger and older.

From my high horse I have all the answers.

The sad part is that my high horse
is a wooden horse.
A horse that only
goes one way, my way.

When I'm on my horse, it's so fixed and sure
that I lose sight of what it's like to be uncertain,
to be afraid, lonely, desperate.
I don't feel the pain that lies behind broken
promises,
broken hearts and broken lives.
My feet are so high off the ground
that I can't put them in anyone's shoes but my
own.

From where I am on this high horse of mine,
I simply forget what it's like to be human.

Lord, I'm beginning to realise
I don't want to be stuck up here.
Please, help me down.

Help me to be like Jesus, like you.

You came down to my level,
eye-level,
prepared-to-die level,
to show me the real level.

Lord, by the power of the Holy Spirit,
help me to be what you want me to be.
Help me to take on my responsibilities.
Help me to make my commitment.
Help me to take my share of the blame.
Help me to share the burden.
Help me to love like you.

INTERCESSIONS

Loving God, we pray for the humble in our world, those who have not chosen their position in society:

- for children sold into slavery or prostitution;
- for women living in subservience because of their traditional culture;
- for those whose work is underpaid and undervalued;
- for those who are unemployed;
- for those who do the dirtiest jobs – hospital, and street, cleaners, refuse collectors;
- for ...

Lord, give them hope, and so work in our world by the power of the Holy Spirit, that the dignity of ordinary human beings may be valued, oppression overcome, and the yoke of injustice broken.

We pray for those highly exalted in our world, those who hold the reins of power:

- for the leaders and members of national governments;
- for the managing directors and executives of multi-national companies;
- for the staff of the World Bank, the IMF, and all international economic agencies;
- for the leaders of the different groupings of the world faiths;
- for ...

Lord, help them to understand the effects of their policies. Grant them true wisdom in the decisions that they have to make, and grant them true humility of heart.

We pray for those who have positively chosen the way of humility:

- for those who have put others first, parents caring for children, children caring for parents;
- for teachers and nurses, police officers and social workers, and all who simply try to do the best job they can for the sake of others and the good of their community;
- for aid workers overseas, whose concern is the wellbeing of often starving and dispossessed people;
- for ...

Grant, Lord, that they may know your love, receive your strength, and rest in your peace. Uphold them in times of stress and self-doubt, give them patient endurance, and the knowledge that are doing your will.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

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May the mind of Christ my Saviour
live in me from day to day,
by his love and power controlling
all I do or say.

May the word of God dwell richly
in my heart from hour to hour,
so that all may see I triumph
only through his power.

May the peace of God my Father
rule my life in everything,
that I may be calm to comfort
sick and sorrowing.

May the love of Jesus fill me,
as the waters fill the sea;
him exalting, self forgetting —
this is victory.

May I run the race before me,
strong and brave to face the foe,
looking only unto Jesus
as I onward go.

Katie Barclay Wilkinson (1859–1928)

DISMISSAL

Lord, help us to mean what we say and pray with humility;
and say what we mean and live with integrity.
May we seek not to impress, but treat all equally;
look not for rewards, but for grace;
and may you bless all that we do
today and every day, now and forever.

Prayers and "Today, Lord, I got on my high horse" from Roots September/October 2005
