

+ Philippians 2:5-11 + Rejoice that Christ Is Our King! + 9th Sunday after Pentecost + 17 July 2016 +

Mass shootings. Suicide bombings. Police shootings and sniper attacks. Terrorist attacks. And that's all in just the last month. Mix into that all kinds of political and cultural upheaval here in the United States—and there's a lot of uncertainty. Stretch out the timeline a few weeks or months or years and things don't look any better, do they? Violence. Bloodshed. Terrorism. A complete disregard for human life both young and old. A complete disregard for the rule of law or morality or ethical behavior. Divisions tear up the human race and any attempt to fix things by legislation or political maneuvering only seems to make things worse—stoking this fire while attempting to smother that one. It's a cultural-fabric-tearing mess!

So who can fix it? You can only ask so much of elected officials, and frankly, they can't change human hearts or minds no matter how many laws or rulings or executive orders they pass. You can only ask so much of those called to serve and protect our communities and country. What's even more troubling in a time like the one in which we live is that all this upheaval strikes right at the heart of something that many of us hold near and dear.

You see, people like you and me like to be in control, sometimes in charge, but at least in control of our lives and livelihoods. That doesn't necessarily mean you like to be a leader or like to be the person in charge of something, but none of us wants to leave control of our lives and livelihoods in the hands of others. It's one of the reasons why folks who have grown elderly with age tend to fight moving out of their home and losing their independence in assisted living—even though that may be the healthy option for them. We like to be in control. Yet we live in a world where you go to something ordinary like a fireworks display and not come home because a terrorist thought he was bringing glory to his false god.

All of these national and international events aside, what typically happens when you think you have control of your life? Does it ever seem like you're trying to carry a scoopful of sand in your hand with the grains of sand constantly slipping through your fingers? You think you can handle whatever life throws at you. You think that your shoulders are broad enough to bear all those "little" issues and challenges and hardships in your life. You think that if you just try to control one aspect of your life, then the rest of it will surely follow, but the sand keeps on slipping through your fingers. The little burdens add up and begin to crush you with stress or guilt. The hardships suddenly seem overwhelming, and you feel like you're not just losing control of that one aspect of your life, but life in general.

Take that natural desire to be in control, which so often fails, and mix it with a world, in which it seems like every week is another reminder that none of us is in control, and what do you get? Uncertainty. Fear. Grief. Pain. None of us likes or wants to endure any of that, but who can you go to who is in charge, who is in control, who knows what's best for you?

Well, this morning we pay a visit to the Apostle Paul looking for answers. He's under house arrest and chained to a Roman soldier. People come to visit him while he stands trial before the Roman emperor. He doesn't have control of his freedom, but you find him writing a letter to his beloved Christians in the Greek city of Philippi—a popular retirement spot for Roman soldiers on the northern coast of Greece. He's writing to believers like you and me who live in a world that has a veneer of control, but underneath has just as much uncertainty as ours does. Paul's readers were tempted just as we are to think they had control of their lives or at least the Roman government did. For that reason, Paul spoke to them about a different Ruler, a different King who is in charge, who is in control, who knows what's best for them.

Paul encouraged his fellow believers to imitate Christ Jesus, their Savior, to have the same attitude as Jesus looking to the interests of others and not just their own. To do that, Paul takes his readers on a very brief tour of Jesus' life from his departure from heaven to his death on the cross. There's nothing glorious about it. In fact, it's all quite humiliating. Paul wrote, **"...Christ Jesus...who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!"**

Behind those words, there's a big question that begs to be asked—"Why?" Why in the world would the Lord of heaven and earth leave everything—all glory, all power, all honor—to be humiliated, to degrade himself when **"equality with God"** was something he already possessed?

It doesn't make any sense. You would expect Jesus to grasp that **"equality with God"** and assert it with all his might. He's true God. He created and controls the heavens and the earth. He had all the comforts and glories

of heaven. He could have come into this world as the amazing, all-powerful God blowing people away with his glory and majesty. With one snap of his fingers or one single word, he could have conquered Satan and the Romans and established a glorious kingdom on earth, but that's not what Christ Jesus came to do.

No, the King willingly came in lowliness. Jesus put himself in that position. He deserved the glory that comes with being true God, but he set it aside to be humbled as a human being, to become nothing in this world. He possessed the power that only God himself has, but he set it aside and allowed others to have control over him. Think about that! Jesus humbled himself and became an infant totally dependent on his mother and adopted father. He humbled himself and became obedient not only to the laws of the land, but to God's holy law. He humbled himself and allowed others to oppose and attack him. He humbled himself and became a servant. That's no more evident than when you see Jesus riding an unbroken donkey, sitting on coats and being praised by ordinary sinners like you and me. He who is over all chose to become nothing.

“And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!” Jesus willingly set aside all of that to die in humility and ridicule and pain. Jesus came to become the crucified criminal rejected by the world, yet he also came to be the Servant-King who saves. Jesus allowed others to take his life in order to save them! Jesus willingly set aside all that glory for people who deserved nothing, but condemnation for their disobedience.

Now why would Jesus do that? Why would Jesus do what is so foreign, so abhorrent, so distasteful to our sinful natures? Why would Jesus be so willing to have God turn his back on him? Paul explains in Romans 5[:8], ***“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*** Out of love for you, Christ Jesus became ***“obedient to death, even death on a cross.”*** He came to unite you with God, to reconcile you as children with your heavenly Father, to declare you not guilty in the court of the holy God, to make you holy in God's sight so you could enjoy the comfort and glory of heaven with him for all eternity. Jesus allowed all that to happen because he knew his death would give you life. In willingly laying aside his glory, in guiding all things although it seemed like he had given up all control, Jesus proved that he is your King.

...But what about all the uncertainty and upheaval in the world around us and in our lives right now? What about all that? Sure, Jesus was guiding all things back then, but what about now? What about the future? If the future will be anything like the present or the past it seems like it will only get worse. How can I possibly be sure that Jesus is in control of all things? Well, Paul takes us back to Jesus to get an answer to our questions. ***“Therefore God exalted him 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 confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.”***

It all started three days after Jesus' corpse was placed in a borrowed tomb. You see, three days after he died, that tomb stood empty. That tomb stood empty because it could not hold the exalted Christ. Death could not contain him, so God raised Christ Jesus to the position of power and authority over all things. The One who bears ***“the name that is above every name”*** is our Savior Jesus Christ—the lowly Child of Bethlehem, the humble King of kings, the sacrificial Lamb of God, the risen Lord.

No matter what's going on in our world, Christ is our King. No matter what violence or bloodshed or terrorism or upheaval, no matter how out of control your life might seem, Christ is our King over all things, and he will come again in glory to bring us home. You see, when he rose from the dead, God placed his seal of approval on what Jesus had accomplished for us on the cross. He now leads you to believe in Jesus and worship him. ***“At the name of Jesus every knee should bow...and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.”*** That reality fills us with joy no matter the circumstances, no matter the hardness or weight of the cross, because that Savior will come again to bring us home to heaven.

So in this world torn apart by division and violence and upheaval, what will you do? You need not lose control trying to grasp it like slipping sand or hide yourself away like a hermit in the desert. No, you and I can humbly serve our King. Remember why Paul was encouraging the Philippians in the first place? ***“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.”*** So we humbly serve in the unique callings that our God has graciously given us. We humbly serve putting the needs of others before our own, all the while reflecting the love of Jesus with humble words, self-sacrificing actions, and confident prayer trusting that Christ our King can and will answer our prayers. No matter what death-dark valley you walk through or what heavy cross you bear, no matter what attack Satan and his minions throw at you, we follow our humble King. We trust that he is in

control because we know victory is already his—victory that we will enjoy in the glories of heaven someday. Dear friends, rejoice because Christ is our King! Amen.