

If you have not been counting, this is my third week leading worship and preaching at Bay View. One of the things that you will notice quickly is that I do not follow the traditional liturgy of the ELCA. I did not grow up in the Lutheran tradition and I was and still am largely clueless on the 10 settings. What I do know and what I do love about the Lutheran worship is our flow. The Gathering, The Word, The Eucharist and The Sending.

One of my favorite components of worship planning is searching for the liturgy that we are going to use for a given Sunday. Some Sunday's the liturgy is chosen to support the direction of my sermon. Then other times, I throw a change-up and the liturgy goes in a completely different direction. When this is done, it is done purposefully.

If you look at our liturgy today, you will see that it is extremely rich in the day that we are in, Palm Sunday. This only makes sense, but the liturgy was more in-depth in that it told the story of the Palms. We will get to the Passion of Christ as we come to Maundy Thursday and Good Friday and my sermon does not rest in a rich Palm storyline. However, it does rest in Christ and it comes from our Second Reading which is in the book of Philippians.

Now, if you are unaware, the passage that I read, is most likely a hymn from the early church. The next time that we are together and conversing with one another; you can thank me for reading the hymn instead of singing the hymn; you do not want me singing.

The hymn is one of the most significant depictions of Christ in the New Testament. The poetic language expresses the two natures of Christ, who was "in the form of God" and "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave" or servant. In this "human likeness" and "human form," Christ "humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death--even death on a cross."

When I was in text study, the other pastors asked what it was that was prompting me to reside in Philippians and I said the following verse is grabbing me:

When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process.

The essence of Holy Week, to me.

The hymn encourages us to have the same mind as Christ. Since, we are just getting to know one another, I will tell you that I am no Greek scholar. It has been 30 years since I sat in Greek class and I did not excel in it then and have not fully put it into practice over the last 30 years, so I lean on colleagues for help when I need to go there and today, I leaned into Jennifer Kaalund who is a Professor at Iona. She shares that the word that has been translated to mind can also be translated as thinking. So, what difference does that make and what does it mean for us here at Bay View and our Door County community? It can be understood as a directive for us to think as Jesus thought.

That's a tough task, I know. PJ is throwing the book at you in Week 3.

Be Like Jesus is kind of like the Campaign in the 90's, Be Like Mike. Does anyone else remember those Gatorade commercials? I was never a Michael Jordan fan, but if I am honest, he was an elite athlete and is in the conversation of the top player of all time, as much as it hurts me to say it.

Jordan's success is attributed to his hard work, dedication to the sport, and discipline. He studied tapes, exercised in order to create the strongest possible body, and practiced various elements of the game until he perfected them.

Thus, many individuals looked to him for their blueprint on how to be like Mike and be a success. Many say that LeBron James, the greatest player today imitated Mike to get where he is today.

Can we imitate Jesus?

Do we have the courage to try?

Are we too comfortable with our lifestyle to attempt to imitate?

Let's look at Philippians and other New Testament passages and see what it might mean for us to be imitators of Christ, and let me be abundantly clear, believers are encouraged to be imitators of God. To whet your appetite, here are four:

We are told

- 1) to walk like Jesus (1 John 2:6)
- 2) to forgive one another (Colossians 3:13)
- 3) to be kind to one another (Ephesians 4:32)
- 4) to love as Jesus did (John 13:34).

Can we just sit with that for 5 seconds?

What would happen to our community if each of us did those 4 things.

Now, back to Philippians and the hymn. In the hymn, there are **two aspects** of Jesus' character are that are emphasized. They are the following two characteristics:

- 1) humility
- 2) obedience.

If we are to have the mind of Christ, we must be humble and obedient. What do those two words mean?

Humility is one's posture in relation to another

Obedience to act or respond out of respect.

In order to be like Jesus, we must not exploit our relationship with God, but respond to it by demonstrating our willingness to serve.

Are you ready to serve?

Leaning into Jennifer once again and her knowledge of the Greek language, we can learn that the word used for form can also mean shape or likeness. The various forms that Jesus takes suggest that **we must also be flexible** in order to be like Jesus. Flexibility is not normally a strength of ours. However, we must be able to adjust, change, and adapt to meet the current need.

I am not sure if the following will blow your mind like it blew mine but let me test it out on you: Jesus emptied himself into humanity in order to change it. In the ultimate act of empathy, Jesus becomes who and what we are, so we, in re-turn, can become who and what he is.

Whoa.

Now, let me be real with you: Growing to be more like Jesus can be filled with pitfalls. As I mentioned before, this walk is no walk in the park. When we do not have the mind of Jesus, we are likely to behave in ways that do not glorify God. When we do not have the mind of Jesus, there is discord, confusion, and destruction. Many times, our churches are laced with those and I believe it is because we purposely don't live into having a mind like Christ.

Now, if I was sitting where you are sitting, I would be thinking, ok PJ, I understand the concept, **but** how do we keep our minds stayed on Jesus?

I am glad you asked. Here are three steps:

- 1) We must refresh ourselves by studying the life, words, and actions of Jesus.
- 2) We must practice kindness, love, forgiveness, humility, and obedience until we have perfected them.
- 3) We must exercise our empathy, not just in words, but by becoming what God needs for us to be.

I have not been with you all of Lent, but during the season of Lent, we have been journeying with Jesus to the cross. Here is our challenge: we are to walk mindfully, being concerned about what concerns him. There is no doubt about it friends, we are in a challenging moment. In this moment, let us be reminded that the God who meets us at the cross is the God who will give us resurrecting power. With that power, we can continue in this journey. May our minds be like Christ. **Amen.**