

## A Reflection on Philippians 2:5-11    Sunday 05 April 2020

I can still remember the first time I really noticed these verses from Paul's letter to the Philippians. It was way back when I was a curate in Taupo, preparing to preach my very first Palm Sunday sermon. I read these verses and the words stopped me in my tracks:

Here they are from the exact same Bible I was reading back then, an NIV  
*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus,  
who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God  
as something to be grasped at ...  
... taking the very nature of a servant ...  
... he humbled himself and became obedient to death,  
even death on a cross*

Wooh!

Think back to Jesus' birth, far from home

- in a stable, with very ordinary parents  
unknown and unnoticed
- recall his baptism ... he did not need to be baptised  
yet there he was, with the crowds, asking John to baptise him
- his time in the desert, his temptation  
his feeding of the multitudes, healing the sick  
being with those who were overlooked, outcast, scorned
- confronting the so-called authorities

It is all summed up here, in these seven verses

- Jesus was God  
but he laid all that aside  
he humbled himself, he was obedient
- and walked the way that led to the cross

That is what literally stopped me in my tracks

- Jesus did not have to do this  
but he did, willingly
- this is huge  
this is what Palm Sunday is really all about

So I found that first Palm Sunday sermon – I still had it, filed away

- and I read it to see what I had written as a fresh, young curate  
so here are a few lines from that first encounter with these verses:

The title I gave my sermon was:

“Acclaimed as king, he died the death of a common criminal”

Through Jesus, God was breaking into this world in a hitherto unknown way. In becoming human Jesus accepted life – sharing our pains as well as our joys. There had to be a “Palm Sunday”, an acclamation, a recognition of Jesus, a celebration of joy. But it could not end there ...

Jesus' path lay the way of the Suffering Servant – a path which led from the road of palms to the cross. He knew there would be pain and suffering for himself, and also for his followers.

But he was obedient.  
He did not turn away.  
He did not accept the role of Warrior King.  
Rather he lived his freely chosen way of the servant.

But not just a servant – one who obeys orders and is under the authority of a master. Jesus was a suffering servant – one who accepts an unjust situation; one who goes through with it on behalf of others; one who suffers that others may live; one who suffers even for those who have rejected him and revile him.

That Jesus himself had committed no crime and was unjustly condemned to die in this painful, tormenting way, was recognised by the second criminal who said to the first: “Don't you fear God?” The injustice was also recognised by Pilate and Herod who could find no reason to condemn Jesus, but yet were not strong enough to set him free.

Jesus suffered for them.

Jesus also suffered for the Chief Priests and Leaders of the people who had conspired to have him put to death.

Jesus suffered for the crowd who set Barabbas free.

Jesus suffered saying, “Forgive them Father. They don't know what they are doing.”

Jesus walked the path of obedience all the way to death – death on a cross; that we might have life. That we might truly have something to celebrate and wave palms about for.

And back to today

- this is the attitude we are to have: not to live for ourselves  
rather to follow Jesus' example and share life  
by sharing our blessings
- and yes, we are to do that now in this situation of crisis  
and perhaps even more on the other side, when we have come through

We are to be preparing now for what we can offer

- to make life better for our neighbours  
our community, our nation, our world
- what can you do?  
what will you do?

A big part of this is about being a neighbour

- taking an interest, noticing what needs doing  
and getting stuck in

Even more than that it seems to me it is a matter of our attitude

- that's what stopped me in my tracks back when I was a fresh, young curate  
and it still has the power to stop me in my tracks now

*You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.*

*Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to ...*

*Instead, he gave up his divine privileges, he took the humble position of a slave ...*

*he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.*

Jesus, Son of God, emptied himself to give me life

- how can I not do the same ...