



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

7643 Huron River Drive

Dexter, MI 48130

734-426-8480

WHAT'S IN A NAME ADVENT SERIES:

MIGHTY GOD – LORD

~ Scripture: Philippians 2:5-8 ~

By Pastor Steve Bringardner

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PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8

“Your attitude should be the same as that of 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!”

This passage is often referred to as the KENOSIS passage. Kenosis means: “to empty”, “to give up”, “to relinquish”. WHAT did Jesus who was “equal” with God give up? And more importantly, WHY?

I. WHAT IS KENOSIS?

Scripture teaches that God the Son—Jesus—the second member of the Trinity, existed from all eternity along with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He was no less divine than God the Father & God the Holy Spirit. He was called “son” not because he was 2nd in command but because of the intimate “relationship” he shared with the other members of the Trinity.

This same Jesus emptied himself (voluntarily) by becoming a tiny baby. . .and later a peasant carpenter from Galilee. . .and finally a condemned criminal on the cross.

Yes, He was God Incarnate! But he voluntarily took on the identity of an all-too-human, all-to-common, all-to-poor & lowly, all-to-frail & fragile, all-to-insignificant & ordinary individual.

Yes, He was the Messiah! But He held no position. He was not a power-broker. He was not a force that made other peoples & nations sit up and take notice.

Yes, He exploded the power of death through His own crucifixion & resurrection! But He submitted to all the brutality, humility, powerlessness that came when everyone and everything turned against Him.

When Jesus emptied himself He gave up something. He let go of something inwardly. He let go of the power & majesty of heaven. And in so doing, He gave us an incredible model to imitate. That’s why verse 5 of our text says: “*Let this same attitude be in you*”. . . “*Model yourself after Jesus*”.

II. WHY IS KENOSIS NECESSARY?

WHY did he urge us to have the same attitude? Because he knows we all have something huge and untamable within us—namely, the EGO (sometimes called SELF).

It is the nature of the EGO to cling to power. [Aren't most marital battles really a struggle to gain or retain power?] We chase relentlessly the illusion of security. We even deny loss so as to appear strong and in control. We refuse to accept limitations when the truth of the matter is, there are some things we can't control, change or fix.

The deepest spiritual need we have—aside from forgiveness of sin—is the emptying of “self”. We need a KENOSIS EXPERIENCE:

- A Kenosis experience is the process of the self emptying itself of self.
- It is NOT beating your body, emptying your mind, making yourself as miserable as possible.
- BUT it is getting rid of ego to make room for the Spirit of God. . .the Holy Spirit.

CHAIR ILLUSTRATION:

Everyone has a chair in the center of their life—called a throne. Whoever or whatever sits in it is in control and calls the shots. If it is ego, then we need to dethrone the ego. Notice I did not say obliterate the ego; I am still very present to make choices and carry on with my life. But we do need to get “self” off the throne so we can put Jesus there as Lord.

VESSEL ILLUSTRATION [another image]:

Kenosis is emptying the vessel of anything that is not working for me any longer—anything that keeps me from growing and becoming an authentic disciple of JC, anything that keeps us as a community from becoming all we could be for God—but retaining enough ego to serve as the walls of the vessel. We empty out our ego so we can be Spirit-filled.

What do you need to empty out this morning? What things of the ego need to go?

- Prejudice?
- Unrealistic expectations?
- Argumentativeness that thwarts communication?
- Tendency to control or dominate?
- Preoccupation (e.g.: workaholism)?
- Excessive competitiveness?
- Excessive need for attention, approval, or affection?
- Arrogance (or, some unwholesome attitude)?
- Anger you've held on to for a long time?

~ *et.al.* ~

III. HOW DO WE EMPTY OURSELVES?

HOW do we empty ourselves of these things? HOW do we go about this process of emptying?

KENOSIS usually begins by reaching a point of self-defeat, which involves:

- Growing tired of butting our head against a stone wall
- Recognizing that our behaviors & illusions are not getting us anywhere
- Then realizing that relinquishing them is the path toward healing

We will find no rest in our soul until we do so!

ILLUSTRATION:

Fresh out of seminary, my first pastoral assignment was to plant a church in a medium-sized city in southern Minnesota. I like to refer to it as the theologians do the creation story in Genesis 1: Creation *ex nihilo* (which means “out of nothing”). There was nothing there when I went. . .and there wasn’t much when I left. We struggled for five years in that city and saw some gains, but the whole last year I was there I knew I needed to move on to another assignment. But I was having a hard time letting go of my original dream in going there. Finally, I did give it up. I accepted the defeat of my ego and the reality of the situation. I can still remember the night I resigned. Going into that meeting, I figured I’d come out depressed and defeated. Instead, I went home with a huge burden lifted off my shoulders. I was freed up. . .I was no longer fighting myself. . .I had a sense of peace about it (even though, at that point, I did not have another church to go to). Within a month I was on my way to Ann Arbor and a whole new vision of ministry began to take shape.

Have you grown tired of butting your head against a stone wall—trying to fix, change, and control things? You know, some things in life just won’t be solved this side of the grave. There are some things which you cannot beat (e.g.: aging & death). The older I get the more I struggle with the thought of giving up power & control over things like health & finances. It’s frightening!

Maybe there are some people & situations you have tried to change – but it’s just not working.

Maybe there are some old ideas of the way things ought to be – but you’re not getting anywhere.

It may be your ego is starting to get in the way! Maybe your only recourse is to let go of people, situations, and things. . .to surrender. . .to accept what you thought was unthinkable!

It’s hard to do! We are all control freaks. We want to control our destiny - our health – our money – our kids – our spouse – our boss – our career path – our parents – our time. And the list goes on. We even think we have the right to control these things!

It’s hard to give up control, hard to give up anything having to do with our EGO. After all, it’s so much a part of our identity, of who we are. Yet, only when we realize and accept the defeat of the ego can we give up control; and only when we give up control can we gain acceptance.

It’s counter-intuitive. We’ve been taught to seize control, not give it up! But Jesus, through Paul’s pen, is teaching us just the opposite.

It may take a mighty act on the part of a mighty God because our egos have such a grip on us. But we need to keep engaged in KENOSIS until we are pure in heart. It will be a lifelong process.

CONCLUSION

Last Sunday, we started focusing on a passage in the Old Testament—Isaiah 9:6—that we’ll use throughout ADVENT:

For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given. . .

And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Last week, we saw that a tiny baby born in a Bethlehem manger would become a WONDERFUL COUNSELOR. Next in the list is MIGHTY GOD. What a contrast!

A *Wonderful Counselor* is compassionate & caring, a good listener, empathic (can step into our shoes). . . whereas a *Mighty God* is powerful, hard hitting, and confrontive.

Don’t we need both in our lives?

Don’t we need a *Wonderful Counselor* who will comfort, console, put the pieces back together, restore us. . . AND a *Mighty God* who will confront our sin, our weaknesses and obsessions (i.e.: the things that are out of control in our lives) and bring them under His control?

I leave you with *Three R’s* for making the Mighty God your Lord:

- (A) RECOGNIZE your powerlessness
- (B) RELEASE your grasp
- (C) REDRAW your scope

(A) Admit your powerlessness. You’re not powerless in every area of your life, but all of us have 3-4 areas (more or less) of powerlessness. Surrender your “assumed right”. Hear what the Mighty God who is Lord of the Universe (and hopefully of your life) says to you: “You’re not sovereign, you’re not in charge of outcomes, you can’t orchestrate every circumstance, you can’t change people (only influence them), you can’t control car breakdowns, you can’t schedule the flu, you can’t time the duration of a storm.”

(B) Let go. If you don’t let go of a gas pump, the tank will fill up and splash out all over the car and you! I know there are automatic shut offs, and maybe that’s why—we don’t seem to know when to let go of the handle.

(C) Get hold of a vision of God’s might, God’s power, God’s awesomeness, God’s overwhelming magnitude. To aid you in doing that, I’ve prepared a hand-out of Old & New Testament passages, entitled “*God’s Greatness*”. It’s available in the Narthex or I can e-mail it to you.

Jesus is a Wonderful Counselor! Jesus is a Mighty God! Jesus is Lord!

Is He your Lord this morning? Does He sit on the throne, or is He merely a soothsayer (someone you consult in the time of trouble). Is He the pilot or the co-pilot? [Remember the old bumper sticker?] Well, if He is your co-pilot, move over!!!

And let Him become mighty in you. . .and mighty in us (the community of faith).