

“Inside Out”

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Philippians 2:1-11; Galatians 5:22-23

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The scripture we read is a letter that Paul wrote from prison to one of the churches he had started and continued to care about and oversee — the church in Philippi. The church was going through some kind of dispute and Paul wasn't happy about it. Paul wanted them to get over themselves and to act like the church of Christ Jesus. How can you possibly grow or make a difference beyond yourself if you are spending your time squabbling, gossiping, seeking control and perhaps even revenge?

The church was full of something. They were ‘full of it’ but they were not full of Christ. Being full of Christ means to be empty of self: empty of ego, empty of your own agenda, empty of being offended, empty of entitlement, empty of the need to control, empty of the need to be recognized, empty of fear... I could go on. (Philippians 2: 5-8)

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross.



The Greek Word for emptying of the self is “Kenosis”. Scholars agree that this little bit of scripture that I just read is one of the earliest Christian hymns. In other words, when Paul wrote this letter, he inserted a familiar song in the middle that the Philippians would

have been familiar with.

One of the earliest confessions of faith about Jesus was that he was one who “emptied himself, taking on the form of a slave”.

That’s quite surprising, maybe even shocking theology. Jesus is God. Jesus is the Christ. Surely, he was not empty? Surely, he was full of the glory and power of God. Or was he?

The more you get to know Jesus the more upside-down and inside-out you start to realize Jesus is and we are called to be.

We are a few months past Christmas, but remember how the Son of God came to this world? Not in power but in tiny, weak insignificance. He came in the form of a newborn baby born in an obscure location to unknown parents. He grew up and lived and taught in relative obscurity.

Jesus had a power that he relinquished, that he gave up — Kenosis — even to the point of dying a humiliating and brutally painful death on the cross.

When the soldiers taunted Jesus saying: *“If you are the Son of God, save yourself!”*

I believe he could have saved himself ... but he chose instead obedience and forgiveness. Even the devil who tempted Jesus in the desert tried to get Jesus to use his real power and authority. The devil took him to Jerusalem and to the top of the temple and said to Jesus, “If you are the Son of God throw yourself down!”

The devil backed up his temptation by quoting the scriptures with Psalm 91, *“For it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you and on their hands they will bear you up so that you will not dash your foot against a stone’* (Luke 9-13; Psalm 91:11-12).

Again, Jesus did not deny that what the devil had quoted was true, that as the Christ he could have thrown himself down just to prove God’s care and concern, just to prove he was the Son, but that was not the role or the purpose of the Christ.

The transforming love that Jesus was to show had to come from a deeper place. If he had come in power and glory, with sound and lights and amazing constant miracles, many more people would have come to believe in Jesus for those 3 years, but it would only have been a surface belief. It would have been a skin-deep salvation, not a salvation of the heart. That kind has to come from the inside out.

This is how the early church also lived and came into being. For the first almost 300 years the church was small, obscure and even persecuted. But then in the year 312 it all changed when the Roman Emperor, Constantine the Great, became a Christian.

Christianity became a legal religion and from that time until your lifetime, until now, Christianity has been attached to government and to power.

We still are to a certain degree. The fact that Christian Churches don’t pay taxes on the land they sit on and enjoy charitable status indicates that there is still a relationship with the government.

But it’s fading. Our denomination came into being by an act of Parliament: the “Act of the United Church of Canada.” When we changed our structure just a little over a year ago, we had to go to the government to make the change. Doesn’t that sound weird today? We tend to call churches like ours, like the Presbyterian, Anglican and Lutheran churches, “Mainline Churches”; but that’s an anachronism because we are not ‘main’ anymore. Remember when Prince changed his name to something that you couldn’t say and so his name became “the artist formerly known as Prince”? We are the denomination formerly known as mainline!

It’s been a bit of an uncomfortable shift and people still get grumbly about schools not having the Lord’s prayer or about people saying “Merry Christmas” instead of “Happy Holidays,” but I don’t think being at the center of cultural and

societal power is what Christ called us to be. I don't think the message of Jesus works when it is imposed on society or on people.

If it did, wouldn't Jesus have been born the son of Herod or better yet the son of Caesar? After all, they called Caesar 'Lord'. It was an act of rebellion to call this nobody named Jesus from Nazareth "Lord". The message of Jesus can't be imposed: it has to come from a deeper place. It has to come from the inside out.

We have a theme running through our Lenten Season and that is the Fruits of the Spirit. Not all of our messages will focus directly on this theme as we have guest speakers coming the next two weeks, but it is something for us to reflect on through the 6 weeks leading up to Easter. How can we produce more of this fruit



in our own lives? The Fruits of the Spirit are not something nice that we can add a dash of here and there to our lives so that we are little bit more patient. The message of Jesus is not merely about becoming a nicer person.

It has to go deeper. We called to something more radical, a total emptying of our self in order to be reborn in Christ.

What does that look like?

It looks like humility. It looks like thinking better of others than of ourselves.

Shane Claiborne is a prominent Christian speaker, activist, and best-selling author. Shane worked with Mother Teresa in Calcutta, and he heads up 'Red Letter Christians', a movement of folks who are committed to living "as if Jesus meant the things he said." Let me read you an excerpt from his book *The Irresistible Revolution* about his time with Mother Teresa.



"Mother Teresa was one of those people who sacrificed great privilege because she encountered such great need. People often ask me what Mother Teresa was like.

Sometimes it's like they wonder if she glowed in the dark or had a halo. She was short, wrinkled, and precious, maybe even a little ornery, like a beautiful wise old granny.



But there is one thing I will never forget—her feet. Her feet were deformed. Each morning in Mass, I would stare at them. I wondered if she had contracted leprosy. But I wasn't going to ask, of course. "Hey Mother, what's wrong with your feet?"

One day a sister said to us, "Have you noticed her feet?" We nodded, curious. She said, "Her feet are deformed because we get just enough donated shoes for everyone,

and Mother does not want anyone to get stuck with the worst pair, so she digs through and finds them. And years of doing that have deformed her feet.” Years of loving her neighbour as herself deformed her feet. (Living as an Ordinary Radical (p.167-168))

It looks like not playing it safe. Jesus didn't play it safe. He loved and cared for those that society wanted nothing to do with: Tax collectors, the woman who'd been caught in adultery, unclean people; people with leprosy. Jesus didn't follow the crowd. We as the church need to continue to love those society or even the Church isn't all that happy about. It's funny because it feels safer right now to stand on the side of the LGBTQ than it does to stand beside the Indigenous peoples of Canada. But we are called to continue the work of reconciliation even when it's not popular.

It looks like forgiveness. Being committed to forgiveness has got to be one of the most difficult ways of being. When people come to me with their great pain, I sometimes have a hard time bringing up the 'F' word with them because the person is so upset and all they can think of is revenge. 'Forgiveness'

1. *Tell your story*
2. *Name your hurt*
3. *Choose to forgive*
4. *Renew or release the relationship*

And I know and I remind myself that the first step in forgiveness is for the person to tell their story. It's important to get it out and tell someone the story of their hurt and their rage at the injustice that happened to them. The next step is to name the hurt and the next is to choose forgiveness. The final one is to renew or release the relationship.

Sometimes it's we ourselves we need to forgive, but we have to be committed to forgiving ourselves too. We need to let go of all hope for a different and better past, because we can't change the past, we can only accept it. We need to relinquish our right to revenge and relinquish our belief that we are worthless. Kenosis—letting go of self to take on something bigger and more significant.

But though forgiveness does not come naturally it is so important, perhaps even essential to healing your wound and to healing the world.

It also looks like peace.

When the world and the news are filled with fear and anxiety about a Covid-19 pandemic and stock market slides and a U.S. election season and a million other things out there and around here, we are called to be different.

Do you remember the time when Jesus and the disciples are in a boat and a brutal storm whips up, and the waves are crazy high and they are being tossed all over the place? The disciples are terrified that this is it — but Jesus is fast asleep at the back of the boat. They wake him up, freaking out and saying

“Master! We are perishing!” Jesus gets up and calms the wind and the waves and asks them why they are afraid.

The funny thing is that they were afraid before because of the storm, but having just witnessed their teacher command the storm to stop makes them absolutely terrified! “Who is this that calms the wind and the waves?!” they ask themselves. Over and over the words of Jesus are “Do not be afraid.”

We need to hear those words today. It’s not because everything around them was calm that they had reason to not be afraid, but because in the middle of the storm they had Jesus in their boat. Can you see Jesus in your boat? What is your fear and your storm? Listen to Jesus saying to you “Don’t be afraid.”

When we empty ourselves of fear — or at least commit to seeing Jesus in our boat — we can have the peace that the world needs. Our community and our world need people who are not afraid of the storm because of the one who is with them, the one who guards our hearts. The world needs our non-anxious presence ... the peace of Christ.

Kenosis. When we empty ourselves of ourselves and we allow Jesus to fill us, that’s when we change; that’s when our relationships change and when our communities and world can change. It is when we practice humility, peace and forgiveness when everyone expects the opposite, when we feel like doing the opposite, that’s when we change the world.

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”
(Philippians 2: 2-5)