

# NEW ADAM'S FEAST

---

**ISAIAH 5:1-7**

**PHILIPPIANS 2:1-13**

**WORLD COMMUNION 2017**

**TOM WHARTENBY**

## **PAUL IS VERY HARD TO UNDERSTAND**

O I'm not referring to his letters. Since the time of 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter their difficulty has been attested to. No, I mean the man himself. Paul is very hard to understand. The letter he wrote to the church at Philippi is the most joyful of all of his writings. "Rejoice in the Lord always, I say again rejoice!" is not just a sentence in this missive, it's a theme. So why does his joy make Paul an enigma?

When he wrote it, he was under arrest for a capital offence. Paul was facing death with little hope of reprieve. And yet he can speak of joy? Not what one usually expects to find on death row.

This, however, is not the most puzzling thing about Paul here. Paul is facing execution and yet he is not drowning in a sea of pitying self-absorption. Paul is writing to the

Christians in Greece because he is concerned about **them**. He is concerned about their fellowship which is being threatened. He's worried about their happiness and welfare.

**SEEMS TWO WOMEN IN THE CHURCH ARE DUKING IT OUT OVER SOMETHING OR ANOTHER.**

What the dispute involves is never mentioned. One can imagine however that people are taking sides. One group backs Eudoria, another Syntyche, while others are trying to avoid the crossfire. All this disturbs Paul more than his impending death. Most of us would be saying "Who cares?" Like I said, Paul is hard to understand. Let's listen to his exhortation found in the reading for this morning.

**PAUL BEGINS BY FOCUSING ON THE GOOD STUFF GOING ON IN THE CHURCH IN PHILIPPI.**

They are a community which encourages one another in Christ. They share with one another and express

compassion and sympathy. By mentioning that they are in Christ, Paul reminds them who they are...the church of Jesus Christ. It is his spirit flowing in and through them which enables them to love one another. This gives Paul much joy, but he wants them to complete that joy by setting aside their petty jealousies. He wants them to do nothing out of selfishness, to stop viewing themselves as better than others. Paul sees pride fracturing the church; he urges humility. Now we value humility although we often fail to practice it, but in the ancient world in which Paul lived humility was not considered a virtue. It was considered a weakness. Much like compromising is viewed in our culture. How in the world can Paul urge them to be weak!

### **HE REMINDS THEM WHO THEY ARE.**

They are the *body* of Christ. That is to say they are Christ's members extending Jesus in time and space. This means they must reflect Jesus in the way they treat one

another and address the world. And who was Jesus?  
What help does he give here?

Paul then goes on to quote a hymn the Philippian Christians sang in worship. Jesus was in the form of God and yet he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. No, he let go and emptied himself. Unlike Adam who wanted to be like God, God emptied himself to be like man, the New and Improved Adam if you will.

Nor did Jesus just pretend to be a man for a while. He lived as we do; he died as we do. He not only emptied himself of divinity he emptied himself of his humanity as well. He even allowed himself to be cut off from God for our sake. Jesus' humility, his self-emptying, issued forth in love for the entire world. In this self-emptying, Jesus was the perfect image of our self-emptying God.

As the body of Christ, the Church is called to preach this good news in what we say and how we live. We are called to preach a self-emptying God whose very nature is love, a love that does everything for the creation and nothing for Himself.

## **WE CAN NOW BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND PAUL.**

Paul can think about others while facing his own death, because he, like Christ, is emptying himself. He is letting go of his concern for himself for the sake of others whom he loves in Christ. He refuses to be self-absorbed, even in this extreme moment.

Paul can think about the condition in the Philippian church because he knows that its mission is more vital than his own life. Paul is obeying Jesus and seeking first the kingdom of God. The Philippians' mission is to spread the good news of the love of this self-emptying God. Their mission is to proclaim all creation's redemption. Compared to this, their petty quarrels pale to insignificance...or at least they should. Paul has imitated Jesus and he invites the Church to imitate him.

**AS PAUL FACES HIS OWN DEATH, HE CRIES OUT TO THE CHURCH TO BE OF ONE MIND.**

The unity of the church is so important that he can forget his own condition in order to urge harmony. Interestingly enough Christian unity was also on Jesus' mind on the night before he died. Jesus prayed for the unity of his followers, "that they would be one as he and the father were one". This unity, Jesus insisted would persuade the world that God had indeed sent Jesus into the world to save it. Disharmony thus threatens the very instrument God is using to save His creation.

One wished that Paul's letters and Jesus' prayer has put an end to Christian factionalism and divisiveness. Alas...

**TODAY IS WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY.**

Christians all over the world are celebrating the Lord's Supper today as a sign of our oneness, a oneness which exists at this moment only in the wishes of Paul and the mind of God. As we take the bread and the cup this

morning, let us pray the Lord's unity prayer, let us strive to heed Paul's exhortation, and let us pray that God would empower us to empty ourselves as our Lord and savior did long ago. Come, let us celebrate the feast of the New Adam