



Christ Lutheran Church

605 South Fifth Street • Norfolk, NE 68701

Share God's Word, share His love, and do it now!

Pastor Chip Winter, Director of Ministries

“Empty and Full” – Philippians 2:5-11

Palm Sunday – March 25, 2018

Pastor Chip Winter

Grace to you and Peace, from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. The text for our sermon is the Epistle appointed for the day and already read for us from St. Paul's letter to the Philippians.

My dear family in Christ, do you consider yourself an optimist or a pessimist? The optimist sees the glass as half full, the pessimist as half-empty. Either way, what you want is a full glass! An empty glass is just there, while a full glass means you have an entire beverage waiting for you! A full glass results in both a sense of contentment and of anticipation, while an empty glass results in **“Hm. Well that's too bad; that's done.”**

We Christians are sometimes mocked for what we go through in this week of the year. **“Your king is to be identified by riding on a donkey?”** and Jesus' Passion, riding into Jerusalem on this Palm Sunday only to be killed on Friday demonstrates that we Christians love wallowing in pessimism, that observing Jesus emptied of all dignity, even of life itself, expresses some kind of deep-seated need to beat ourselves up, always looking on the dark side. We Christians are too guilt-ridden to allow ourselves to enjoy life, much less a full glass.

Then, next Sunday when we celebrate Easter, we'll be mocked for foolish optimism – for believing a story about an ancient figurehead of ours; that He actually rose from the dead. Get a life,

we're told. Do you really need such a crutch? Get a grip on reality and stop this whistling past the graveyard optimism.

Thankfully, this week is not about a glass, half-empty or half-full. It's about, as St. Paul described it, Jesus emptying Himself so that we could be filled. For as someone once put it, you cannot truly celebrate Easter without observing Lent.

Some, regardless of the week, will charge us with pathological pessimism because we often start by talking about sin. We enter Luther's Small Catechism that way, studying the Ten Commandments and how in their mirror we are shown our sin, before we get to the Gospel of the Apostles' Creed. And it's no wonder, because sin is so much with us.

St. Paul encourages us to have this mind which was also in Christ Jesus. That's a mind that is humble, coming into Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey. That's a mind of perfect obedience, allowing Himself to be arrested and tried, tortured and killed, according to the Father's will. That's a mind that is an example of perfect love: love in giving His own blood for our salvation; love that empties one's self to serve others.

We're commanded to empty ourselves like that, but we always come up, well, empty in the effort. Ironically, it's because we are so full of ourselves, acting out our own selfishness. Words are added to the dictionary each year, with many describing such activity: for example, have you been guilty of "**Phubbing**"? That snubbing someone right next to you when you take out and use your cell phone instead of talking with them – they're not as important as your need for a social media fix. Or, do you suffer from "**FOMO**"? That would be when you cannot access your phone and you develop a **Fear Of Missing Out** on something while you're not connected – which has its own description in **FOBO – Fear Of Being Offline**.

Another dilemma is that, with rare exceptions such as Mother Theresa and Father Damion, the world often assumes that those who serve just don't have what it takes. They're less talented. Or, they're less driven. Or, they're less successful. If they had it together they'd be the leaders, not the servants.

This is not simply being pessimistic or looking on the dark side. This is reality. This is the way our sinful human nature works. Trying all by yourself to empty yourself, you'll always come up empty.

The focus needs to be back on Jesus. Jesus, in emptying Himself, did not come up empty but instead it led to His being exalted to the full, over all!

During His earthly ministry Jesus didn't always or fully use His divine nature or powers. This is the evidence of His humility. This began when He emptied Himself to become one of us – a tiny baby inside Mary. It continued in putting Himself in our place – the place of sinful humankind, under the law. Ultimately it meant not using His divinity to defend Himself against His sinful creatures doing those things we will meditate on again this week: His arrest, trials, beatings and death – even death on a cross. He allows Himself to be killed – a fully human experience.

But in this God the Father exalts His Son. Jesus is the name above all names, the one at which every knee shall bow in every place. Every tongue will confess Him as Lord. This is the Savior Who now fully and always makes use of His divine attributes. This is the One Who has forgiven us and called us to be His own through all eternity.

In Christ Jesus, then, we who are empty are also fully exalted. Jesus is not just an example that we are to try to follow. What He did counts for us. We are not able to empty ourselves of our sinning. But the assurance I want you to have, today, is that He took the place of sinful humankind

under the Law in order to fulfill that Law, perfectly, for us. He took our everlasting condemnation as His own, so that we won't endure that everlasting torment in hell.

And in His resurrection, He brings us His righteousness. It's a righteousness that forgives our selfishness. It forgives our **phubbing**, our **FOMO**, our **FOBO** and every other vestige of our self-centeredness.

And it means that each one of us shares in Jesus' exaltation. We wear His name for all eternity. When we kneel before Him it will not be bowing in shame but worshipping in faith and joy. With the angels our tongues will forever sing His praises. Knowing this forgiveness and the future that is assured for us fills us with a love that can humble itself in service to others – with the mind like Christ's.

It empowers our service and it provides the proper motivation for our service after Jesus' example. God's purpose in this call to have that mind of Christ as our own is, as Oswald Chambers once put it, not **“that God wants to make us perfect specimens of what He can do...producing specimens of holiness to put in His museum...I am called to live in perfect relation to God so that my life produces a longing after God in other lives, not admiration for myself...God's purpose is to make us one with Himself.”** (My Utmost for His Highest).

This is a week filled with tremendous highs and lows, as we follow Christ Jesus from His triumphal entry to the Last Supper, the Garden of Gethsemane, the horrors of His suffering and the triumph of His resurrection. All of this He has done, willingly and without complaint, so that you could know forgiveness, reconciliation with God, and life-everlasting as His child. Hosanna in the highest! Amen.