

Behold the Man in the Form of God

Palm/Passion Sunday

Pastor Josh Frazee

Php. 2:5-11

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Just as certainly as young Wesley will grow up into a man and boys grow into men is the fact that Jesus grew up to be a man as well. We've been hearing this Lenten season that Jesus was a man. God took on human flesh in His person. Yet it behooves us to remember that Jesus, while one hundred percent a man, was also one hundred percent God.

The theologian Martin Chemnitz wrote of Jesus according to our Epistle text in this way: "He was in the form of God,' that is, in wisdom and power equal to the Father." We saw moments of this in Jesus' earthly life, in His working miracles and on the Mount of Transfiguration. But Jesus did not use His God-ly power at all times, or in ways to subvert the mission with which He had been tasked.

Verse 1

We heard in our text: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men."

Jesus did not usurp His Father's power when He was a man among us. Unlike us, Jesus was God and could have used His powers at any time He desired. But in order to fulfill the Law in our place, Jesus took "the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men." Jesus was born to His mother Mary and lived as her child in the same way Wesley is living as Ronnie and Abby's child. Jesus went from a toddler all the way to a man who walked the regions of Jerusalem proclaiming God's Word. He lived, He breathed, He ate, He drank, He worked, He slept—He did all the human things—including living under God. Jesus did not use His power to create food from the stones when the Tempter tempted Him but instead combated the Tempter with God's Word. And Jesus did not call down the angel hosts to ward off the Pharisees and scribes when they persistently attacked Him, but gave them chances to repent and believe.

So Paul wrote to the believers at Philippi, and to us, to "[h]ave this mind among yourselves." In other words, to live as servants of God, not trying to usurp God's power, but living in joy and peace under it. Joy, whether in times which are good and fun, or even in those times of suffering and persecution. Peace, whether in times when everyone agrees with God's Word or in times when we are mocked and shunned because of His Word—not combatting anger with anger, but with love and patience, desiring instead that the worldly turn from the ways of the world to the saving way of God in Christ Jesus.

Most assuredly we could not hope to have this mind among ourselves before we were brought to the truth of God's Word—being condemned by His Law and then brought back to life by the washing of baptism and the hearing of His Gospel in our Savior Jesus Christ. But even today, after our baptism, we cannot hope to have this mind of ourselves in and of ourselves. Only in keeping in God's Word—His Law continually breaking us down to repentance and His Gospel building us up as His beloved children will we have this mind.

Verse 2

Our text continued: "And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Our old sinful nature wants nothing to do with being at peace and enjoying life the way God wants us to. And so we see that the old nature is still at work within us as we still feel that way even after being baptized. So we call out with the crowds we heard this morning, “‘Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!’” We cry Hosanna—God, save us! Who can rescue us from this body of sin? Thanks be to God through our Savior, the God-man, Jesus Christ.

Once more we hear how obedient Jesus was to God—even though He was God Himself—“becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Jesus rode into Jerusalem, knowing full well it meant His death. He rode into town because He knew that it was God’s will that He do it. So, despite having the power to resist or to fight off His impending death, Jesus rode into town, gentle and riding a donkey. He rode into town knowing that He would soon be nailed to a cross—those nails going through His very hands and His very feet. The thorns of the crown of thorns poking directly into His head. The whips of the flagrum piercing His back almost to His internal organs before carrying the cross. And on the cross itself, suffering the separation from God His Father—not because He had done wrong, but because humanity had done wrong, because humanity had wanted to be its own god, indeed because you had done wrong, because you had and currently still want to be your own god.

But Jesus went to the cross “being found in human form.” This Lenten season, we learn from Him how to endure even in the midst of persecution of the worst kind. On the one hand, doing it out of fear of God—not fearing the ones who can kill the body but the One who can kill the soul in hell—and on the other hand, doing it out of fear of God—the respect that He deserves for sending His own beloved Son to die for me and to die for you.

Verse 3

Because Jesus humbled Himself even to the point of dying on the cross: “Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

God gave Jesus the name that is above every name: Jesus Christ. Today, through the washing of Holy Baptism, God has bestowed on Wesley and each of us that name. We are Christians, ones bearing the name of our Savior Jesus Christ. It is the name that we bear as we live our lives on this planet so that, should we run into mockery or persecutions, we might bear them as Christ Himself did. And so that, should that mockery or persecution come from fellow Christians, we might stop and remember that His Name is above our own. It doesn’t matter what your first name is, it doesn’t matter what your last name is—Jesus Christ’s name is above both of them. When we remember this, we remember how Jesus died for us and for those brothers and sisters who bear the same name, and we forgive one another, holding the name of Christ over our own names.

And at the same time as we remember this, when we find those who are not Christians persecuting us, we remember that Christ Jesus died for them, too, and so we forgive them, and we reach out to them in the hope that they will repent and believe along with us.

So continue, dear friends in Christ, to Behold the Man—Behold the Man who was in the Form of God, yet who did not use that form to subvert God’s plan, but to fulfill it, even Jesus Christ our Lord. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

