

## 9.27.20 L26P17 Emptied and Exalted

- Whether an election is like this one filled with polarization, accusations and bitterness, or a more ordinary election when there are simply honest differences between two candidates, here are some common characteristics for almost every candidate in almost every election
  - The common or usual characteristic of a candidate include...
    - Demonstrating an appearance of power and authority. No one wants to vote for someone that they might regard as a wimp.
    - Knowing and having the support of powerful people. Not only do endorsements matter, but also favors tend to get stored away to be used and cashed in later
    - And it always helps to look religious. Gaining favor with at least one part of the religious electorate usually results in some additional votes
  - But here's the thing. Today's scripture readings remind us in no uncertain terms, that if we were to apply these criteria or characteristics to Jesus, by much of his behavior, and by some of his parables, Jesus couldn't have been elected to be a dog catcher
  - Today we are confronted with words and images about Jesus and the Kingdom of God that are shocking and surprising, unless we begin to absorb and embrace the topsy-turvy nature of Christ and his kingdom
    - In today's gospel reading, it was the nice, pious, religious establishment that questioned Jesus authority.
      - And in response, Jesus told a parable that scolded them, and on our worst days, this parable continues to scold even us
      - A man had two sons. He asked the first one to go to work in the vineyard, but he said he would not go – however later he changed his mind and went. Then he asked the second son to go out and work in the vineyard, and he said, “Sure Dad!” – but that son didn't go.

- So which son did what the father asked? The one first said no, but then who actually went out and worked.
- So far, so good
- But Jesus told that parable to scold religious piety that says one thing, but then does another!
- And then... THEN Jesus said that people who were and still are looked down on – the tax collectors and prostitutes – Jesus said that these lowly people were like the son who at first said that he would not work in the vineyard, but in fact, he went and obeyed the father
- Apparently, the lowly sinners of Jesus' day were more open to the kingdom of God, than many of the religious folks who only talked a good line
- By telling this parable, and by scolding the religious establishment, Jesus clearly would not get many votes from either the religious folks or the well-connected and powerful people
- It seems that in his ministry, Jesus lived out the famous words from the Garth Brooks song, "I've got friends in low places.!"
- Now in addition to the scolding parable that Jesus told, there is the whole issue of the personal power and authority of Jesus
  - And today we also have a wonderful and amazing reading from Philippians, a piece of scripture from the early church
  - In most editions of the Bible, part of this reading is put on the page in the form of a poem, rather than as a part of paragraph.
  - In fact, many scholars think that these words might even have been an early Christian hymn that was sung in worship, and for those of us who are my age or older, we probably sang this on the Sunday in the season of Lent – and if you are younger than I am, this is how some of these verses sounded when they were sung in Lent: "Christ hath humbled himself, and become obedient unto death: even the

death of the Cross. [Service Book and Hymnal pp. 24 & 53]”

- Or as we heard in today’s reading:

Christ Jesus,

<sup>6</sup>who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited,

<sup>7</sup>but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,

<sup>8</sup>***he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross.***

<sup>9</sup>THEREFORE God also highly exalted him  
and gave him the name  
that is above every name,

<sup>10</sup>so that at the name of Jesus  
every knee should bend,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

<sup>11</sup>and every tongue should confess  
that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father. [2:5b-11]

- The song of the scripture, the song of the church is that Christ humbled, or emptied himself, took on the form of a servant, and obediently and willingly went to the cross
  - In the earthly ministry of Jesus, God empties himself of all power and pretense and royalty, and lives and dies humbly
  - And then... THEN only after giving himself, only after death itself, was Jesus exulted
  - In Jesus, we see first the emptying and the humility, and THEN, it is precisely BECAUSE of that humility that Jesus was and continues to be exulted
  - Again, this is no way to win an election, and no way for Jesus to become a winner of the popular vote
- But here’s the thing, we do not vote for Jesus like a candidate, and we do not choose Jesus – instead the gracious work of God, is that God in Jesus Christ chooses us!
  - The hymn from Philipians reveals the deliberate work of God to set aside glory, to empty God’s self, to be die on the cross, and then to be exulted

- God deliberately chose the empty form of a servant who went to the cross as the shocking way to bring in the Kingdom of God
- We do not have a candidate to choose, we have Christ who first emptied himself and then was exalted, and then he chose us
- And the one who has done the choosing, the one who used death on the cross as the unexpected path, this one has chosen and welcomed not just good religious people, but also the outcasts of this world
- Because the Christ who willingly became lowly, made many disciples and friends in low places, and continues to welcome them into the Kingdom of God
- And now we hail the power of Jesus' name, who first emptied himself for us, and now is exalted as our Lord.