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Palm Sunday • Philippians 2:5–11 • March 29, 2015

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With its meaty theological content and rich poetic imagery, it is no surprise that the lectionary lifts this portion of Philippians from its context.

Exegetical Notes

Verse 6: Our English too often comes off sounding like Jesus was something less than God, as if he merely appeared to be God. However, a distinction between μορφή and its synonym εἶδος is that μορφή can indicate that Christ's appearance is the reflection of his true substance. Jesus has the form of God because he is in every sense of the word God. Paul concludes verse six "(Jesus) did not count equality with God a

thing to be grasped.” One might conclude that Jesus was not equal with God and that prior to the incarnation he had the opportunity to seize equality, but rather chose the humility of the incarnation. However, this is not consistent with μορφή. I would offer that an alternate translation of ἄρπαγμὸν is that Jesus did not count equality with God a thing to cling to. Paul elaborates in the next verse.

Verse 7: (Jesus) emptied himself. Rather than clinging to equality with God, Jesus let go of everything for us. Paul describes this using different imagery in 2 Corinthians 8:9: “though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”

μορφὴν δούλου λαβίων: Notice that μορφήν is the same word used in verse 6. It could be argued that Paul is using the term to simply mean “form.” However, it also could be that Paul is consistent in his use of μορφή in this passage and that he intends to tell us that being a servant is intrinsic to the nature of God. As if to drive the point home, notice that Paul uses ὁμοιώματι to describe the incarnation. In contrast to μορφή, ὁμοίωμα indicates that the image is a copy of the original. While Christ became fully man, his essence was more than just a man.

Verse 9: διὸ: This is a strong conjunction best translated “for this reason.” Yes, you could simply translate it “therefore.” However, that seems too simple. It almost makes it sound like a concession the Father makes to the Son for a job well done. Rather, this was God’s plan and purpose. God, the Father, begot the Son, born in the flesh to suffer and die for our sins. It is because of this reason that Jesus is given, literally “graced,” with the name that is above all names.

Preaching Notes

One could use Philippians 2 to prepare a powerful message of an unthinkable sacrifice that would reunite two hearts torn apart by betrayal and deceit. While our text does not set the backdrop, Genesis 3 does a pretty good job. You could also use passages from Hosea 11. In that chapter the Lord shares his grief over his lost love through Hosea’s grief for his unfaithful wife. The story continues—how will the two be united once again? In our modern tales weapons would be assembled, plans would be made. Retribution and vengeance would fall upon the one who betrayed or caused the betrayal. But, how can you bring vengeance upon the one you still love? How can you crush the one you want to save?

Now we enter into Philippians 2. The Lord God almighty set in motion a plan. Not a plan of retribution, but a plan of restoration and rescue. Setting aside the glory of his kingdom, Jesus becomes a slave to humanity. He takes the guilt, the shame, and the humiliation of the one who is unfaithful. He brings himself to the cross for the sin and shame that belongs to his love. His bloodied brow and pierced body are not the stuff of romance novels or movies but are images of his act of obedience, which is true love.

Christ is exalted. He is exalted because his sacrifice removed the barrier between God and his love, you and me. As Paul says in Romans 5:1, “we have peace with God

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through our Lord Jesus Christ.” His sacrifice enables us to confess with great joy Jesus is Lord. He is my Lord.

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