

“ I LIKE YOUR CHRIST – I JUST DON’T LIKE YOU CHRISTIANS”

Philippians 2: 5-11

It’s Palm Sunday – can I hear some “Hosanna in the Highest Heaven?” Many people in Jerusalem that day spread their cloaks on the road ahead of Jesus – Jesus was coming to Jerusalem as a King! I love the Apostle Mark’s straight-forward, detailed description of Jesus’ triumphant entrance into the Holy-City that day. Some might view Jesus’ flamboyant entrance as just that – Jesus, personally wanting to soak up the adoration and praise of the people, as he rides the colt down main street.....”Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!” “Hosanna in the highest heaven!” And then Mark tells us that when Jesus entered Jerusalem, he went straight into the temple courts – Does Mark give us this picture of Jesus “strutting his stuff” into Jerusalem.....Jesus, all “High and Mighty” as King of the Jews! A pompous King who all should bow down to.....Most Biblical scholars agree that Jesus enters Jerusalem as a king, which also inaugurates Passion Week – The last week of Jesus’ life and ministry in the confines of this, the Holiest of cities. But it also was a deliberate messianic action by Jesus – Who purposefully offers himself as the Messiah – Knowing that his actions will provoke the Jewish authorities to take action against him.....No, Jesus knew his days were numbered, and his triumphant ride into Jerusalem that morning signified the beginning of the end for Jesus – Can you imagine how Jesus felt that day? His disciples knew nothing of what this week would bring.....They were riding high with the accolades of “Hosanna’s” ringing in their ears – Jesus knew what he was in-for, and he welcomed it.....And this kind of thinking and action goes against the very nature of our human existence. Think about all the things you’ve been taught about how things work in this world today.....”Look out for number one!” “Do unto others as they would do unto you, but do it to them first!” “Get in the first punch!” “Race to the top!” Doesn’t matter who gets hurt or left out in the process – Survival of the fittest, right? There can be no doubt that we live in a world filled with people and institutions who don’t care one-iota about the needs and well-being of others.....It’s every man, woman, and child for themselves. During this COVID 19 health crisis, we see people beating each other up for a roll of toilet paper or a bottle of hand-sanitizer. The viciousness and the nastiness of people has been on display, and then we have the apostle Paul telling us in our scripture lesson from Philippians that in our relationships with one another, have the same mind-set as Jesus Christ, and not only look to our own interests, but also to the interests of others – This world-view is quite a bit different than the dog-eat-dog animalistic lives of many of us have become accustomed to – I think Mohandas Gandhi said it best when he stated, “I like your Christ – I just don’t like you Christians!” When Paul wrote this letter to the church at Philippa, things were not peachy-keen.....People were being.....well, people! The church was messing up – Division was taking root – Feelings were hurt – The gossip-mill was running rampant – People were taking sides, and the war had begun. There was disagreement, misunderstandings – its part of the human experience, is it not? And it’s the kind of things that rip churches apart – It gets in the way of our own walk-with-Christ.....it tears at the seams of the church’s mission to serve the world in humility and love. We humans, we get side-tracked by these things, and before we know it, we are like that run-a-way train headed off the tracks.....And a lot of people get hurt as a result. And a lot of our Kingdom-Work gets left undone, and these kinds of factions and angry divisions also cause those people on the outside of the church to say, “See, those Christians are no different than anyone else! Why would I want to be part of that? I get enough of that unkindness on my job, or at home, or wherever!” “I like your Christ – I just don’t like you Christians!” And we Christians, we must admit that really, we’re no better than anyone else – When we fight, we demand our rights, or demand that others bow down and ask forgiveness for hurt feelings.....We certainly are acting as if we are better than anyone else, are we not? We’re not acting

much like the Christ we say we adhere to.....You ever caught yourself doing this? I catch myself all the time – I can be such a mess – A sinner – And a self-centered sinner at that! And if you're like me, this is the point where I go....."Uh – Oh!" My attitude should be the same as my Lord, Christ Jesus – I must do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in my humility consider others better than myself.....We should be saying "Cool!" "Alright!" This is what we want – This is how we want to live our lives – This is what it's all about – And it really is.....But it doesn't seem that way when we're sure someone else is wrong....and we're right. When the anger of our bruised ego is burning bright – When we're asking people to take sides – When we're in a fight, it becomes about me, and when it becomes all about us – Verse 6 of our scripture lesson is very applicable, is it not? It says, "Jesus Christ, who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage." To every one of us who has been caught up in envy and selfish ambition – being equal to God seems like a great prize – Something to glory in and exploit for our own purposes.....I'll show them! We get caught up in this kind of attitude, where we miss the meaning of power – God's power – Christ's true power, which is found in complete and utter self-giving.....And when we fight for our right to be right, we're not being self-giving at all. Our attitude has to be the same as that of Christ Jesus. Verse 7 and 8, "Rather he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness – and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross." And although he didn't deserve it, Jesus shared a sinner's fate – He died by crucifixion – The particularly painful and shameful death of rebels, thieves, and slaves – Being in the form of God, meant dying the most gruesome of death's for us, because he loves us – And does nothing out of selfish ambition, but in his humility, considers others better than himself. Jesus looks after the interests of others.....This is the attitude of Christ – He makes himself nothing, and Jesus did this, not just on the cross – He did it his entire life, for the sake of the multitudes of people – his befuddled disciples – for the diseased – the outcast – for women – for children – for everyone he came in contact with – This is the attitude of Christ – Choosing to pour himself out, even to the point of crucifixion – Not grasping at glory, but living, loving, and dying as an emptied self. This should be our attitude as well. But most of us Christians act so unlike our Lord Jesus Christ! And as Gandhi said, "I like your Christ – I just don't like you Christians." And isn't this what the world is telling us this morning? Isn't this what so many of our young people are saying to us as they make the decision to stay away from what they call "Organized Religion?" Jesus didn't gripe and groan – He wasn't cranky and mean – He didn't pick sides, nor did he pick fights. Jesus didn't leave some people out, and let others in – Jesus didn't judge – Jesus is nothing like us! When confronted with such a radical message, I need to ask myself, "What difference would it make if we were to hear these words directed at me?" How can I practice having the "Attitude of Christ?" What part of my own mind-set do I need to let go of in order to be more like Jesus? How would I change if I were to focus on my need to change rather than the need for others to change? I must remember who I am and who I am called to be by Christ – lest my pettiness draws me into a selfish attitude and I lose my servant-identity – My servant calling – my servant mission – Jesus Christ lived his life by not building up himself, but by building others up, and we are invited to be like Christ, who gave up power and privilege to be in the midst of a suffering world – There is no commitment more noble – More life-giving – Embracing the call from Christ to convert to humility – To willingly empty ourselves for others. Will you pray with me please, "Lord, help us to be more like you – Lord, help us to want to be more like you – Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer! In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.....Amen!