

Emptied Himself– Palm Sunday -March 24th 2013.

5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11)

Beloved in the Lord,

You cannot fill a vessel that is already full, you can only fill an empty vessel. I have here a glass of water. As it is full to the brim, there is no more room for me to pour in anymore water. I also have here a jug of fresh water that I would like to pour into this glass, but in order to do so, I must first empty the glass.

In order for us to live a life that honours and glorifies God, we need to present to Him an empty vessel for Him to fill with His Holy Spirit. I often quote the following words that Paul wrote to the Romans:

“Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Romans 12:1-2

To effectively offer yourself to God, you must first empty yourself of you. You must get rid of the ego. To offer yourself to God, is to submit to His will; to not follow your thoughts and wishes, but to submit wholly to His thoughts and leading. This is not an easy thing to do, because we have a strong ego that continually resists God. Our will is very strong and often gives in to temptations. It is not easy to submit to God, but it is always blessed.

God’s ways are always perfect and right. He does not make mistakes. His will is always the best option, without fail.

To offer yourself to God, is to trust Him totally and completely. There are many who are willing to trust god in some things, in as much as they see some benefit in it for themselves. Some will follow Jesus as long as it is in line with their desires and advantageous to them.

Today is Palm Sunday and we commemorate Jesus triumphal entry into Jerusalem, as He came in riding on an ass. The crowds were enthusiastic and thronged to see Him. They laid clothes on the road and waved Palm branches and shouted Hosanna. Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna to God in the highest.

They greeted and welcomed Jesus as a King and they were ready to submit to His authority, because they hoped that He would save them from the oppression of the Romans that occupied their land and territories. Hosanna was more a political cry – save us – than a religious one. They hoped that this Jesus would get rid of the Romans and be their King. Had Jesus done this they would have been subject to Him. But when it became clear that this was not His mission and that He was representing a Heavenly Kingdom, the Kingdom of God; their cry changed from Hosanna to crucify Him!

Even one of His own disciples, Judas Iscariot, turned against him and sought how to deliver him into the hands of the Pharisees and Chief priests.

You see there are those who will follow Jesus up to a point, in as much as it suits them, but as soon as Jesus agenda is different to theirs, they turn against Him and fall away. We read in Luke chapter 9:

⁷ As they were going along the road, someone said to Him, “I will follow You wherever You go.”⁵⁸ And Jesus said to him, “The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.”⁵⁹ And He said to another, “Follow Me.” But he said, “Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father.”⁶⁰ But He said to him, “Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God.”⁶¹ Another also said, “I will follow You, Lord; but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home.”⁶² But Jesus said to him, “No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Lk.9:57-62)

All three of these cases teach us the same truth and that is that you cannot serve God with a divided heart. To follow Jesus means to put Him first each and every time in every circumstance. To put Him first, we must empty ourselves and take on the form of a servant, as Jesus did. Nothing can be of more importance to you than God’s will, than your relationship with the Father through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit – nothing!

Jesus put it like this in His sermon on the mount:

“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” Mt.6:33

The word first means FIRST. We are to put God and His Kingdom at the top of our list, number one priority above all else. Whatever is more important to you than God becomes your idol. Anything you place before God, is a direct transgression of the very First Commandment: “You shall have no other god’s before me.”

In His infinite grace and mercy God gave us His Son Jesus and had Him suffer death on a cross, had Him bear our sin, had Him go through hell in our place that by the washing of His blood we may be saved.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” John 3:16

Jesus emptied Himself of all the glory of heaven, humbled Himself, came down to earth in human flesh, took on the role of a servant, took our sin and died in the most humiliating way, hanging despised and naked on a cross for you and me. He is the Son of Almighty God, and He did that for you and me. He did it to save us from hell.

How can we not give Him top priority in our life? How can anything or anyone be of more value than Him?

One of the very first things Jesus did on Palm Sunday when He arrived in Jerusalem was to go to the Temple. He saw the state it was in. It was corrupted, more a market place and a den of robbers than a prayer house. He cleansed the Temple.

Today we need to humble ourselves before Almighty God, and empty ourselves of all that does not glorify Him. Pray that He show us what is not of Him, what is not pleasing and honourable to Him. Ask Him to expose our idols, and then repent and be cleansed of them. In that place we ask that He fill us with His Holy Spirit.

All of us have idols. We have things or people or thoughts that raise themselves above God. Let the Holy Spirit point these out and then let's change and put God first in every area of our lives.

This emptying process can be and usually is quite painful. None of us like to see the real truth about ourselves. We are masters of self deception. There is nothing hidden from God and no good comes of an unrepentant heart. David puts it well in Psalm 32:

***“How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,
Whose sin is covered!***

***² How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity,
And in whose spirit there is no deceit!***

***³ When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away
Through my groaning all day long.***

***⁴ For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me;
My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. Selah.***

***⁵ I acknowledged my sin to You,
And my iniquity I did not hide;
I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord”;
And You forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah.***

***⁶ Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to You in a time when You may be found;
Surely in a flood of great waters they will not reach him.***

***⁷ You are my hiding place; You preserve me from trouble;
You surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah.***

***⁸ I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go;
I will counsel you with My eye upon you.***

***⁹ Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding,
Whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check,
Otherwise they will not come near to you.***

***¹⁰ Many are the sorrows of the wicked,
But he who trusts in the Lord, loving-kindness shall surround him.***

***¹¹ Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous ones;
And shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart."***

Pastor Colvin S. MacPherson Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sydney.

All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.