

The Jesus I Want to Know:
The Humble King
John 12:12-19

March 20, 2005

C.S. Lewis once said, “The best thing about Christianity is that no one could have guessed it.” Our Messiah is born in a stable. We let our King ride in majesty on a donkey. We hang our Savior on a cross. How odd of God. Who can imagine it? A horrible week in the life of His disciples becomes a holy week in the life of His followers. Who can comprehend it? Even Palm Sunday, a simple parade becomes a paradox. Those who crown Him King will soon call for His crucifixion, for God can never be put in a box.

The Jesus I want to know is a humble King. I would like to put those two words together this morning. He became one of us so we could become more like Him. The Bible says it best in an early hymn of the Church recorded in Philippians 2:5-11. *“Your attitude should be the same as that of Jesus Christ.”*

WE TAKE ON THE MIND OF CHRIST WHEN WE EMPTY OURSELVES. Philippians 2:6-8 says, *“Christ Jesus, who being in the very nature of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. Instead he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!”* He humbled himself.

A man visited a Rabbi seeking spiritual enlightenment. Before they began their discussion, the Rabbi poured the seeker a cup of coffee. He proceeded to fill the seeker’s cup, letting the coffee overflow into the saucer and eventually dripping all over the seeker’s hands. “What are you doing?” asked the shocked seeker. “Teaching you a lesson,” replied the Rabbi. “You come seeking spiritual guidance, but your life is already full of many things. How can I pour more into an already full cup? You must empty yourself of other things if you really desire spiritual things.” We often come to church saying, “Fill my cup, Lord, fill it up,” but in reality the best thing that we could do coming to church sometimes is to pour it out, pour out the many things in our lives so that there is room and place for God to fill us with spiritual things.

We are busy people; we live busy lives. We are full of plans, projects, problems, and possibilities. We have things to do, places to go, tasks to accomplish. Into our frantic worlds, we try to fit in a little faith. If we plan carefully, we find a way to squeeze in an hour for worship and a quick prayer at the stop light. God will have none of it.

The first move of Holy Week for all of us should be to empty ourselves in the presence of the Lord. The word here is kenosis. It means “removing something from a container, or pouring something

out of a pitcher until there is no more.” Even as Christ emptied himself of his deity that he could become fully human, so we must empty ourselves of our humanity if we are to make contact with the Divine.

This kenosis takes place in two ways.

1. Sober Thinking. Romans 12:3 puts it this way, *“Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but think soberly, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.”*

A CEO of a Fortune 500 Company was traveling to the hometown of his wife when they stopped at a gas station. The man pumped his gas and went inside to pay. When he returned, he found his wife engaged in a deep discussion with the service station attendant. As they pulled out of the station, the husband inquired about his wife’s intense conversation. “I knew the man,” she explained. “In fact, I used to date him.” Feeling confident the husband continued by saying, “I bet I know what you were thinking. I bet you were thinking you’re glad you married me, a Fortune 500 CEO instead of him.” “Actually, I wasn’t thinking that at all,” confessed the wife. “I was thinking that if I had married him, he’d be a Fortune 500 CEO and you would be a service station attendant.”

Humility comes from the root humus. It means “down to earth.” Humility is not low self-esteem, it is not doormat existence, it is not personal punishment, it is not living in a sense of guilt. Humility is keeping your feet on the ground and your mind on Christ. We come to Holy Week as humble people.

Peter Marshall once said, “Lord, when we are wrong, make us willing to change and when we are right, make us easy to live with.” Humility Lord, teach us how to pour it out that we may have more of you.

2. Servant Leadership. The place where God calls us is that place where our great gladness and the world’s great need come together. I think that is so true. God is always calling us to that place where our great gladness and the world’s great need meet each other.

Albert Schweitzer said, “One thing I know, the only ones among you who will be really happy, are those who will have sought and found a way to serve others.”

On the night when Jesus was betrayed, when the devil had already prompted Judas to betray Jesus, in a place where James and John jockeyed for position and Peter thought himself above denial, Jesus took a towel and began to wash the disciples’ feet. It was a normal custom. There was a servant in every place to do that, but the disciples, struggling with whom is going to be on his left and whom is going to be on his right forget to take care of the necessary detail of foot washing. So nobody bothers to wash anybody’s feet. Jesus does it and when he is finished he says this in John 13:14, *“Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet.”*

No one stands taller than when they stoop to serve. He came among us as one

who serves.

WE TAKE ON THE MIND OF CHRIST, WHEN WE EXALT HIM LORD OF ALL. In Philippians 2:9-10 we read, *“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.”*

We exalt Christ when we kneel in worship. Worship is not designed to please us, but to exalt Jesus. The question is not did the service suit me? The question is did it honor God? Jesus said, *“God is spirit and those who worship God must worship in spirit and in truth.”* Worship is not about style; worship is about Spirit.

In genuine worship God’s presence is felt, God’s pardon is offered, God’s purposes are revealed and God’s power is displayed. In genuine worship we bow before our Maker. Easterners have the art of bending and bowing as a means of respect. It’s hard to get Westerners to bow their heads, much less bend their knees. In genuine worship we are hushed by the Divine. *“Let all mortal flesh keep silence.”* In our noisy world let us find a place to be quiet. In genuine worship my eyes are opened until I see a glimpse of the truth God has for me. Worship deserves our best attention and deepest devotion. We will get more out of worship if we focus on God instead of the people around us.

We exalt Christ when we confess him Lord of All.
*All hail the power of Jesus’ name, let angels prostrate fall
Bring forth the royal diadem and crown him, Lord of all.*

Lord of all, Lord of our lives. The word is kurios, which means “a person who has authority over others, a master, a chief, a ruler.” Have you crowned Him Lord of your life?

St. Augustine used to give people a little quiz that went something like this:

What is the opposite of white? - black
What is the opposite of hot? - cold
What is the opposite of fast? - slow
What is the opposite of that which is? -
that which is not—nothing.

Jesus is the opposite of nothing. He is everything. He is all in all. *“Through him all things were made and without him nothing was made that has been made”* (John 1:3).

The greatest damage we do to Jesus in our day is not our disbelief, but our patronizing attitude. Jesus is Lord, yet we insist on calling him everything else.

C.S. Lewis said, “I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish

things that people say about Jesus. I'm ready to accept Jesus Christ as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God."

That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic or the devil himself. You must make your choice. Either this man was and is the Son of God, or else he is a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool; you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or, you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord. But, let us not come away with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that option open, nor did He intend to.

Jesus is Lord. It was the earliest Christian Creed. Are you willing to crown Him Lord of your life?

The real question today in 2005 is He your Lord? Have you crowned Him Lord of all. Is He fighting today in competition with all of the other gods that we have created in our own world? Would you dare to bow before Him on Palm Sunday and crown Him Lord of all?

Not to the gates of Jerusalem alone does Jesus ride today, but to the gates of our hearts. There He waits, knocking, knocking, knocking. His knuckles must be sore by now. The gentle rap has been smothered by so many contemporary rivals that some of us can barely hear it. But He is there at the door, and He keeps knocking. Why don't you let Him come in?

Amen.

