

Are You Kidding Me? [Text - Philippians 2:3-11]

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In this morning's New Testament reading, you and I are called to do something that's really *mind-bending*: "Have this mind among yourselves, which you find in Christ Jesus, who...did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking on the form of a servant....And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross." To borrow Francisco Lindor's car commercial catchphrase "Are you kidding me?" Sorry, Saint Paul, but we live in a society where fame and fortune are highly prized; therefore the idea of voluntarily surrendering one's power and prestige, seems utterly preposterous. And let's face it, power and control, wealth and opulence aren't exactly strangers to the Church itself! Nevertheless, as Paul reminds us, the relinquishing of power and personal glory is central to the message and mission of Jesus Christ. Jesus recognizes that changing the world for the better, takes a radical change of the human heart. It requires that people be willing to put the needs and concerns of others, before their own.

As Jesus rides into Jerusalem, he realizes that he is likely heading toward his own death. He's well aware that the message he brings - a message of Divine compassion and grace for *all* people - will not be *accepted* by all people. Yet he doesn't change the message. He is resolved to teach and to show that Divine love and grace isn't just for a select few. Of course, this puts him at odds with the religious authorities - those "select few" who think they have the monopoly on Divine truth and acceptance. Additionally, Jesus is agitating the Roman authorities, because the message he proclaims is raising the hopes and stirring the spirits of the poor and the oppressed - making Jesus a potential

threat to the rich and powerful. Furthermore, there's even a growing sense of disappointment in Jesus among the common people, as he shows no apparent interest in overthrowing their Roman oppressors.

As the week between Palm Sunday and Good Friday progresses, the purpose of Jesus' visit to Jerusalem becomes much clearer to all. He hasn't come to take charge, or to forcibly capture the city; he has come to win the voluntary allegiance of people's hearts and lives. His mission is to help people see, experience, and *trust* that the inclusive love of the Holy One is for them, for others, and for this entire world. And Jesus is willing to endure tremendous pain and personal loss, because he understands that only by his undying commitment to the Divine Way of love and grace can his life - or his death - make a lasting difference in the way others might choose to live or to die.

It is possible, and popular, to trust in our own self-reliance and self-protection - individually, or even as a nation; to try to guard ourselves against pain or loss, or being taken advantage of by others. Yet it's also possible to trust in the love and care of our Divine Source; which certainly doesn't mean that we will escape the pain or loss that Life can bring. What it *does* mean, is that you and I can share Life to the fullest - knowing that ultimately our lives are eternally linked to our Divine Source. And when we truly believe this, you and I - like Jesus - can boldly and selflessly stand-up for what is good and loving and true, regardless of the cost.

Jesus will not allow himself to be intimidated by the religious or political power-brokers who seek to silence his message. Nor will he be discouraged by the fickleness of the crowd, who cheer him one day and condemn him the next. Jesus' unshakable trust in the never-ending love of the Holy One allows him to move faithfully and fearlessly forward, in spite of the threats and

dangers that surround him. From the moment he rides down the Mount of Olives, things continue to go down-hill for Jesus. His followers betray and deny him; his closest friends forsake and abandon him. Yet he doesn't lose faith; he doesn't give-up on the mission, or the message. He trusts that the Power of Divine Love and Grace will ultimately triumph over the forces of fear and hatred, suffering and Death. Easter morning is the glorious reminder that Jesus has it right.

This morning, you and I can also trust in the power of Divine love and grace to keep *us* safe and secure - in the good times and the bad. For us to do so, requires a willingness to let-go of the earthly power and possessions that we think will somehow protect and save us. It means a radical adjustment to the way in which many of us have been programmed to think and to operate. Or as Saint Paul would say, it requires that we 'Have this mind among ourselves, which we find in Christ Jesus....'

Jesus Christ places his whole life in the capable care of the Holy One. He is convinced that this is the right and rational thing to do. He knows that it will take a radical act of Divine Compassion and Self-giving, to counterbalance the rampant greed and selfishness that infects our world. And today, Jesus Christ calls you and me to carry-forward those Divine acts of self-giving love. Doing so, is certainly not an easy task. Fortunately, we don't have to do it alone. The same Holy Spirit who inspires and empowers Jesus, calls and gathers, inspires and empowers you and me to work together today:

By standing-up for the poor, the oppressed and the outsider;
By caring for those people in our world who are most vulnerable and at risk.

Doing this, can be an extremely costly venture, as Jesus clearly shows us. Yet it is also the most meaningful and magnificent way in which you and I can live. For not only does it give our lives

genuine purpose and value in the here-and-now, it also infuses our very existence with a Divine quality that will endure throughout the ages.