

St Peter's, Ealing  
Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> September 2020  
Trinity 16 YrA

### Christ and the model of humanity (Philippians 2.1-13)

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At the time of Paul, Philippi was a small town in the Province of Macedonia. It was about 100 miles or so from Salonika on the Via Egnatia, one of the great roads of the Empire, connecting the far-flung regions to the Imperial Capital. It had been founded by Philip of Macedon and nearby it witnessed the defeat of Brutus and Cassius by the armies of Antony and Octavia (soon the Emperor Augustus) after whom the city was also named (*Colonia Julia Augusta Philippensis*). In the time of Philip of Macedon, it had been a gold mining town. By the time of Paul the gold had long gone as had Philippi's civic power, although it retained its Roman City status. Yet as many cities on the Roman version of the information superhighway Philippi would have been the recipient of many exotic, oriental philosophies.

Here then were a people used to different and varied ideas and into this melting pot came Paul of Tarsus. Paul's mission here is to share the good news of Jesus Christ; to encourage the faithful to a full life in Christ. Now, this epistle might be considered one of Paul's letters from prison. Some question if this was even written by Paul at all. Whichever, this hymn we are offered in the Letter to the Philippians, more specifically vv 6-11, is a poetic, Christological hymn connecting the person of Jesus, our shared humanity and the redemption offered by God who is our Father.

This portion of the letter splits into two parts with one connecting sentence. It opens with a statement or directive of what should be expected of the people of faith, humility and charity. "Do nothing from selfish ambition" says Paul, "but in humility regard others as better than yourself." And if you are uncertain why this should be part of the life of faith, it is because we should, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus". And then Paul in the second part of this passage uses what might have been a pre-existing hymn, maybe even from the Palestinian Church, to tell us why we should live this way. Because Jesus did.

The hymn opens, connecting Jesus with our redemption through humbly sharing in humanity totally and unreservedly; leaving equality with God and that eternal, divine existence, taking on the mantle of humanity that leads to death, a death given for us prematurely in his crucifixion. Through his act of redemption Jesus is exalted. It is earnest and valued and it is through this act for all humanity that Jesus receives the name above all names. Because of Jesus' act for us we then confess him as Lord giving glory to God. In humility the Christ joins humanity to bring us close to God, opening the way to salvation not from a place of superiority but humility as an expression of love.

If we understand this about Jesus Christ, then from it comes our understanding of our part in his mission and ministry. For this redemption is not something that is done to a passive receiver. We do not just sit there and receive Christ's redeeming love. Through our baptism we become an active participant. In Christ, humanity has shared with God in the redemption of the world.

We share in that ministry. It is not ours personally but together we are called through fellowship in mission.

This we proclaim in the sharing of the eucharist. This table fellowship is our sharing in Jesus as Jesus shares in us and we do this together. It is why we share in broken bread and, when regulations allow, a common cup. We are one as Christ is one.

Paul asks the Philippians to be of the same mind. We say in the eucharist, "though we are many we are one body because we all share in the one bread." As Christ in humility and love has joined with us in our humanity, may we join with him in the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim God's love in all the world; with God at the centre and ourselves in God's service.