

An Anthem Worth Living For
World Communion Sunday – Sunday, Oct 1

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Philippians 2:1-13

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Imitating Christ's Humility

2 If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, 2 make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. 5 Let the same mind be in you that was[a] in Christ Jesus,

6

who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,

7

but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,

8

he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

9

Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,

10

so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

11

and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Shining as Lights in the World

12 Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

An Anthem Worth Living For

Choir, this morning your anthem was beautiful. It's amazing how music touches the deep places of our hearts and communicates messages that mere words simply never could express. Throughout the centuries music has proclaimed the messages of our heart. Music has been used to take moral stances on hot button topics, for lovers to share of their deepest most intimate expressions of affection for one another, and even national bodies to declare pride in their country and express deeply held shared values. Music has been used for declarations of celebrations and even offered up in protest.

Perhaps one of the most terrifying and inspirational examples of this in our history – was the way African slaves used music to communicate coded messages with one another. Slaves lived a threatened life, knowing full well if they ever were to outright speak up against their owners or utter words of freedom – they or someone they loved would be beaten and killed. But... that didn't mean they were silent. Instead, it is said that they found other ways to communicate with one another. One way they did this was... music using African spirituals and hymns to communicate messages within their community about the underground railroad and escaping to freedom. Songs such as this familiar hymn.. (Choir sings a few bars of *Wade in the water*)

“*Wade in the Water*” was a song associated with the underground rail road that contained explicit instructions to fugitive slaves to get into the water to avoid being seen and make it to freedom. “Wade in the water – God’s gonna trouble the water” This song was used as a map where directions are coded into the lyrics... It communicated clear messages about, direction, preparations, and instructions.

In a similar way... this song also was also used to communicate with one another. (Choir sings a few bars of *Sweet Chariot*)

If a slave heard this song he or she would know that they had to be ready to escape. The underground railroad (the chariot) is coming south (swing low) to take the slaves north to freedom (carry me home.) This became one of Harriet Tubman’s favorite songs and a song that led to freedom.

And finally are you familiar with the American folk song *Follow the Drinking Gourd*? The "drinking gourd" refers to the hollowed out gourd used by slaves (and other rural Americans) as a water dipper. But here it is used as a code name for the Big Dipper which points North indicating that slaves should make their way north from Mobile Alabama to the Ohio River and freedom.

Not only did these hymns and spirituals indicate clear messages about how to literally escape to freedom... these hymns also communicated messages about how to find freedom within – Freedom found and given only by living in faith in God. God is larger – than any of these human

forms of oppression. Through the rhythms, words, and the beat, the slaves would gather in community and sing with all they've got giving it all over to God. It was a freedom that No one could take that from them. To sing these anthems they were entering into the gravest risk. But these anthems? They were anthems worth dying for.... Because they were the anthems that carried them to life.

In Paul's letter to the Philippians, he inserts what would have been a familiar hymn to the Philippians, often referred to as the Christ Hymn or Even Servant Hymn into this passage. While there is some debate as to whether or not Paul wrote this song... by bringing this song into the letter he takes something from the life of the congregation as to embody of his message of the gospel. He uses this hymn because it says what he wants to say –... it provides direction, preparation, and instructions to a people of faith.

Paul's Christ Anthem essentially consists of two parts– the first, is we are to be One. We are to act as one body, we must overcome that what divides and live for the whole. We are not to live for our own selfish motivations but rather to live for the members of the body for the body. The second Part is that we are to empty ourselves and fill ourselves with Christ. In this hymn, Paul is equating Jesus with the life of a slave – surrendering everything, risking his very own life, to serve God. He is calling for the same surrender for all believers for it is Christ alone that we should live for. Paul calls the Philippians to imitate Christ. Now, imitating is very different than... impersonating. Adam – Adam came to impersonating God by desiring more knowledge and acting out of selfish human motivation. Rather Christ imitated God by humbling himself, taking on the role of a servant to all, The one who gave his very life for God.

As an old man, Paul is sitting as a prisoner, a prisoner both literally and metaphorically for the gospel. He is starting to contemplate the end of his own life knowing full well that this message of the gospel was one that he could lose his life over. In his later writings he starts to refer to himself as a martyr... one who, like Christ, is willing to sacrifice it all. Paul has embodied the words of this Christ Hymn by the way he has lived. This was Paul's Anthem and it was an anthem worth dying for..... because it was an anthem that revealed how to live. For living in Christ is the only thing worth living for.

To proclaim this message embedded in this anthem, Paul entered into risk. Paul tells the Philippians to work out your Salvation with fear and trembling. Singing out our faith doesn't always feel good or comfortable - as it might on a Sunday morning when we are surrounded by people we love swaying to the music. But to stand for what we believe in – to declare out our message to a world in trouble – means we must be willing to put our full selves into it – we must be willing to give and sing out all we've got.

And so this morning, I wonder, What is your anthem? What directions, messages, or instructions do you want to sing out? What message is SO important to you, that you would be willing to enter into risk and give all that you have for it?

On this world communion Sunday – a day when we gather as One body – many stories coming together to share in the large story of Christ.... What is your anthem for the world? What is the song on your heart for our brothers and sisters in faith?

Is it a song of protest? A song for peace? Is it an anthem that demands better? Or a hymn that evokes the presence of God? Is it a call for unity? Or perhaps a prayer for silence.

Perhaps it's a hymn of comfort for troubled times such as "What A Friend We have in Jesus all our sins and griefs to bare.... What a privilege it is to carry everything to God in Prayer.

Or, as Joyce shared her hymn with me earlier this week... perhaps it's "O Master Let me Walk with Thee in lowly paths of service free; tell me thy secret help me bear the strain of toil the fret with care." - a hymn perfect for Joyce – who carries the burdens with such love and care.

Maybe it's a song we sing for our children that really just says it all... such as "Jesus loves the children, all the children of the world"

Or Perhaps it's a hymn of liberation – " I said a Pharaoh, Pharaoh – Oh Baby let my people go!!" a visionary voice calling for freedom.

What is the anthem that the church, community, our world needs to hear? What are you willing to risk for it? Would you risk relationships? Freedom? Acceptance? Even love?

Is it an anthem worth dying for? Is it an anthem you will live for?

Amen.