

Christ Lutheran Church Palm Sunday 4/13/2025
Victory in the Valley - Share the Victory Philippians 2:5-11

Way back in 1988, my wife and I were awaiting the arrival of our first child into this air-breathing world. While we could have had the doctors determine and share with us the gender of our child pre-birth, we decided to get the news day-of-delivery. In preparation for that day, we did the pre-work of choosing both a male and female name for the child. We even went to the extreme of preparing the master layouts for each of the announcement cards knowing that only one of them would ultimately end up at the printer. I remember being highly invested in the name Carmen Christine Jameson for a female, although that didn't win the election. The master layout for a female child had the name "Lauren Christine Jameson" - almost got what I wanted, but not quite. Turns out it didn't matter, as the 36-year-old child who was born that day has the name of Michael Colin Jameson.

Today's Scripture reading from the apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians reminded me of that whole decision-making process. As a 2nd-year student at the seminary at that time, preparing for a year of vicarage/internship in Parma, Ohio, I was deeply into learning a ton of really cool stuff about the Bible and about Lutheran doctrine and about pastoral ministry. One of the cool stuffs that I learned had to do specifically with this section of Scripture from Philippians. These verses have been given a name by scholars over the years due to their prosaic structure in sharing the humiliation and exaltation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Speaking of that structure, which itself is a cool stuff, in the original language verses 6-8 are made up of 10 lines and 90 syllables, and verses 9-11 are made up of 9 lines and 91 syllables. Add the center of it all? "*even death on a cross.*"

But that's not the cool stuff I really wanted to share. The cool stuff for me was the name attributed to this section of Scripture. In Latin, are you ready? Carmen Christi . . . yeah! See where I got my most ideal name for a female child? And there is even a whole scholarly book devoted to these verses with that very name! But as cool as that Latin name is, the English translation is much more relevant and inspiring for us: Carmen Christi means "Song of Christ." And what an appropriate name! Because, within these verses, God gives us a most complete summary of all that He sent His Son our Lord to do for us.

If there was any ultimately appropriate time to let the Song of Christ resonate from God to us then through us to others, it would be the week that begins today on Palm Sunday. There is good reason this week is called Holy Week in the Christian Church. It is called Holy Week because the events we encounter this week are the fundamental events God brought about to reconcile us to Himself and give us the gift of eternal life! These events are holy - they are special, they are set apart; and through these holy events we celebrate during Holy Week, God has made us to be His holy people.

Now being holy does not mean that you and I are sinless; no, that comes later when we are finally brought into God's kingdom of glory. What it does mean is that the One who is the definition of Holy has done what is necessary to make us holy in His sight. Sin forgiven, eternal life restored, all by His gracious actions in our Lord Jesus Christ - the same gracious actions which the Song of Christ sings over us today through these words in Philippians chapter 2.

But, as you are probably aware, God's Words always come in a very specific context, and we would not do justice to the Carmen Christi if we simply pulled the song out of context and let it stand all by itself. So, just like it is in the Christian Church today, just like it is in our congregation today, just like it is in

our individual lives today, the Philippian church had its own sin issues even though they, too, were God's holy people.

The reason for the gift of the Carmen Christi was the fact that the Philippian Christians were having troubles with the whole concept of "lordship" in their lives. "Lordship" implies power and/or rule over another individual or group. And so, in some of my most and least favorite words in the Bible - words that actually were the foundational words Vicki and I chose to have shared at our wedding 39 years ago - the apostle Paul addresses this issue in first four verses of chapter 4, just before the Carmen Christi: "*So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from His love, and any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*" And right after that? The Carmen Christi, the Song of Christ.

As those who have been made holy by God's work in our Lord Jesus Christ, one of the greatest temptations we have is to consider ourselves more significant than others. And it's not only because we know that God has made us His own through Christ and we are special, it is also because we have an innate, sinful - almost lustful - need to lord it over other people - to have power over, to rule over. I don't know exactly what that looked like in the lives of the Philippian Christians. But I can come up with a couple of potential "lordship" issues with which we may struggle. Maybe it's the way you look at or feel about people who are living ways that you know are not in line with God's Word. Do you have any feelings of superiority there? What about any husbands here . . . have any issues with needing to lord it over your wives? Or, I have seen the opposite to be true, as well . . . ladies? Any frustrations with your man which cause you to count yourselves as more significant or superior? What about any Republicans who are here? Any feelings of superiority over some other group of people?

Each of us has our own issues with lordship, but God would like us to understand what lordship really means. To us baptized and believing "lords," God, through the apostle Paul, presents another Lord - THE Lord. And for all of us who confess this Lord as our Lord, it is time to actually live under His lordship, not assert ours.

In the midst of us being confronted with our sin, God sings very powerful and transforming words into our ears - the Song of Christ "*who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*"

Our Lord Jesus, who is so far above us as our Lord, placed Himself below us, took our sin and depravity on Himself, put it to death on the cross, and then exalted us to His Father as forgiven and holy. And it is this mind that we can have among ourselves - "*which IS ours in Christ Jesus,*" the apostle Paul writes - it is this mind that can move us from being lords to being one another's servants. As God has humbled Himself for us, so we can do for others, with the hope and goal that we can, one day, present them to God as forgiven and holy. It's the beginning of Holy Week. May it begin a new commitment on our part to sing and live the Song of Christ. Amen.