

LOVE IS SOMETHING IF YOU GIVE IT AWAY

Philippians 2:1-13

Power – raw power – is a great deal in the news lately. There is the crisis of a shortage of power in the form of oil and gasoline. There is world-wide competition for the supply of energy and therefore be it oil or coal or natural gas, the cost of energy is increasing. And there is fear – legitimate fear – that our country doesn't have a sufficient supply of these natural resources and therefore we are to some degree at other countries mercy. The power to sway enough voters in enough states to win the presidency of the United States is very much in the news. All eyes are on John McCain and Barack Obama to see who will edge ahead in the polls. \$700 billion dollars represents a whole lot of power. Will it be enough to bail out our economy? Can Democrats and Republicans in Congress and the President agree on the sharing of this incredible resource? It's a question about power. The might of the U.S. armed forces, with all our resources of men and women, missiles, tanks, ships and planes are being deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan as we battle to control those two vital regions.

Holy Scripture has a very different understanding of power. Instead of competing for limited resources the essential biblical message about power is that it is given not to be grabbed or hoarded or controlled or grown, but rather power – true power, real power – is meant to be given away.

Paul quotes the most beautiful early Christian hymn in his letter to the Christians at Philippi to make that point.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

It is a beautiful hymn celebrating Christ Jesus' self-emptying love.

In the world's point of view we normally think of *power* as a limited resource. Power is finite. Someone wins and someone loses. To keep power is to keep control. To lose that control is to lose your power. Power is gained at the expense of another. We are always in competition over a limited quantity of whatever makes for power, be it money, control, military might, the vote, natural resources, or whatever.

If that is finite power, it would seem that God's power would be the same sort of thing on an infinite scale: infinite control, almighty power, ultimate majesty. And yet what Paul glorifies for us in this hymn about Jesus seems nothing less than the *humiliation of God*. The God who empties himself becomes a servant and dies on a cross, is a shocking

contradiction of all that we naturally mean by *almighty, all-glorious, all-wise, all-powerful*.

“*Here is a wild new Gospel,*” writes the former Rector of St. Thomas’, 5th Avenue, Fr. Carroll Simcox:

The Eternal Christ, the living God becomes a helpless babe, born of a girl in a stable. The all-glorious becomes a slave in rags whom beggars spit upon as he carries his cross to Golgotha. The all righteous Judge appears as a bosom companion of tax grafters, prostitutes and drunkards. Yet in this very action, we have the audacity to proclaim that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, forgiving sin, and making the whole creation new.... That in this infinite humiliation is the very power of God’s love revealed. In this wild Gospel everything is topsy-turvy. The eternal is revealed in a mortal. Majesty is revealed in servanthood. The power of God revealed in the apparent defeat of death on a cross.” (*They Met at Philippi*, Oxford, 1959, pp. 76-77)

Here is a completely different and radical view of power. God’s power – power to save, power to transform us with new life, power to heal, power to forgive, power to love – is given through the self-emptying sacrifice of Jesus. Spiritual power is not gained through grabbing or asserting oneself, but rather in giving one’s self away. A simple children’s song perhaps says it best: “*Love is something if you give it away, give it away, give it away... love is something if you give it away, you’ll always wind up with more.*”

Paul was speaking to the Christians of Philippi about community. “**If**,” he tells them... “*If there is any encouragement in Christ.*” If you as individuals have gotten anything at all out of following Christ. **If** “*there is any consolation from love.*” If his love has made any difference to you at all. **If** there is “*any sharing in the Spirit.*” If you have any sense of being in touch with and strengthened by a power beyond you. **If** there is “*any compassion and sympathy.*” If you have a heart... if you care at all. “**Then**” Paul tells them,

“be 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 regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

If – as an individual – Jesus has changed your life, transformed your heart, helped you be a better person, forgiven your sins, given you hope and joy, well **then** you had better share the gifts you have received with others in Christian community.

Verse 5 is the kicker. “*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.*” Jesus didn’t live for self but for others. He was the man for others. *If* he gives us spiritual gifts of life in him *then* they are not given for ourselves alone but for others. The same mindset that Christ Jesus had is the mindset we should have as well. Paul applies this in Philippians primarily to the way we should live together in Christian community. We

should put others first. We should put our own needs second. We should be humble. We should worry about other people's interests before our own. Paul calls us to put on Christ Jesus' mindset of giving as we live in Christian community. "*Make my joy complete,*" he tells them, "*be of the same mind, having the same love, being of full accord and of one mind.*"

How would we apply Paul's principal as it relates to the wider mission of the Church? Do we exist for ourselves or for others? Do our resources – this beautiful building, our music program, our educational resources, our staff, our endowment, the ground rent, as well as this congregation with all our experiences, our skills, our time and money... do we have all these resources primarily for our selves or for others? And if others, for whom?

Listen; do you hear the sounds of the city around us – cars, sirens, horns, people chatting, etc.? We are here for them. What do you see when you go out these doors? Do you see people on the streets and sidewalks, do you see the apartments in the tall buildings all around us? We are here for them. When you go home and go about your daily life do you see your friends, your work mates, your family, your neighbors? We exist for them. Look wider to the needs of the world in which we live – those who are hungry, communities and countries and regions in great need. We exist for them. *Let the same mind be in us as was in Christ Jesus who did not count equality with God as a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave.*

The Vestry goes on retreat this coming weekend to work on our mission. What is our mission? Who are we called to serve? What darkness does the light we are blessed to share together in this place, need to shine on? As Jesus was the man for others how can this Church community be a resource and community for others? How can we be a shining light of Christ's love in the midst of Stamford? The Vestry's work on retreat will be to understand and begin to state that mission.

If the greatest power in the universe emptied himself – stripped himself of power and divinity – by becoming a human being just like you and me, in order to die for us freeing us from the power of sin and death, shouldn't we learn to follow his example and give ourselves away in love? After all, *love is something that if you give it away, give it away, give it away... love is something if you give it away, you'll always wind up with more.*
Amen.