

## **“Empty Yourself”**

### **Sermon – April 13, 2025 Stone Presbyterian Church**

---

Six days. What a difference six days can make.

We start out the day saying, “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!!” celebrating a triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem with the waving of palms. Hence, “Palm Sunday.”

Six days later we say, “Crucify him, crucify him!” and somewhat ironically call it “Good Friday.” To be fair, “good” here is in an old sense of the word meaning “holy” or “sacred”, like when we refer to the Bible as “the Good Book.”

And we call this week “the Passion of the Christ” using “passion” in its original meaning of “suffering.”

Last Tuesday at our last Lenten Study Father Dan Caruso from St. Mary’s church discussed the events and traditions on each day in Passion week. For us here at Stone Church, we’ll hear about the betrayal of Jesus and the origins of our sacrament of communion at our Maundy Thursday service and at our ecumenical Good Friday service we will hear the Passion story up through the crucifixion of Jesus.

Since not all of you will make those services, most preachers use today to speak about the Passion lest you go from the joy of the palms to the joy of the empty tomb while skipping the ugly but vital part in between.

Between now and Thursday, things seem to be pretty well. Jesus cleanses the temple; debates the religious leaders on his authority, paying taxes to Caesar, the resurrection of the dead; criticizes the scribes and Pharisees hypocrisy; and prophesizes about the future and his fate.

And then Judas betrays him on Thursday and things rapidly devolve: arrest, trial before Pilate, Herod (in Luke’s version), back to Pilate and

## **“Empty Yourself”**

### **Sermon – April 13, 2025 Stone Presbyterian Church**

---

then crucified. And Luke’s version emphasizes that Jesus is innocent. He gets railroaded because he is inconvenient.

And many of the people shouting “Hosanna!” when he entered town now say “Crucify him” because he let them down. People wanted a Conquering King. Instead, they got a Suffering Servant.

Maybe that’s why they clamored for the release of the insurrectionist Barabbas; a man with perhaps a more impressive track record of pursuing social change.

Frankly, the same thing would occur today. The ethos of many in our society mirrors ancient Rome’s values of fortitude, self-reliance, and indifference to circumstance. They would agree that today “The fundamental weakness of Western civilization is empathy.”

The epistle lesson today from the Apostle Paul’s letter to the church in Philippi gives a different slant.

In today’s passage there is no triumphal entry into Jerusalem, no last supper, no betrayal by Judas, no complicit religious leaders, and no Roman overlords. Instead, the passage offers an intimate view of Christ’s passion revealed through his attitudes and actions.

We’ve often talked about the first part of Paul’s admonition for the Philippians to “have the same mind.” This is not about “group think” or becoming an unquestioning cult.

Paul wants the Philippians (and thus us) to embody and be guided by the kind of decision-making that leads one into the ways of Jesus, opens one up to God’s life-giving power that permeates all of creation.

Having the same mind as Christ means having the same intentions, the same acceptance of God’s call. It means following Jesus’ mindset in

## “Empty Yourself”

### Sermon – April 13, 2025 Stone Presbyterian Church

---

Gethsemane. As verse 5 says, “Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.”

Verses 6-11 that follow are a hymn that the early church sung and it is almost like Paul is forcing the Philippians to listen to the actual words of one of their most precious hymns in order for them to see how their attitude and corresponding actions do not align with those of Christ who is the Supreme Lord of the church.

And yet, verse 6 says, Christ Jesus “did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped.”

The Greek word for “grasp” (also translated as “exploit”) describes the act of seizing or taking something by force. It is often used in Scripture to depict how religious and political leaders greedily plunder and steal from the poor and the oppressed, even as they boast of their piety and spiritual exploits.

*Harpagmos* [har-pag-MOS] is the Greek word so if, y’know, you’ve been reading the news, you can say, “Oh, so that’s what it’s called!”

Despite Christ being equal to God, though, verse 7 then says, “but [he] emptied himself, taking the form of a slave.”

We translate the Greek word *keno* [ken-OH] as “empty” and in the New Testament, *keno* is often used metaphorically to describe the act of rendering something powerless or divesting oneself of status or privilege—the exact opposite to Roman—and our—society’s values of honor, status, and power.

Jesus utterly abandons being Lord of the universe to take on the status of a slave. Philippians 2:8 fills out this idea by saying that Christ “humbled himself.” He did it himself to himself.

## **“Empty Yourself”**

### **Sermon – April 13, 2025 Stone Presbyterian Church**

---

In the passion narratives of the Gospels, the emphasis is on how Christ is humiliated -- spat upon, tortured, crucified. Here, no one does this to Christ. He chooses for himself. In emptying himself of his status, he does not give up his self; rather he gives full expression to his self in his obedience to God.

Thus, hearing this passage on Palm/Passion Sunday is a much-needed sobering reminder that Christ’s road to exaltation came by way of the self-emptying of his life for others.

For Paul “he emptied himself” is defined not by what Jesus gave up, but by what he took on. That is, Jesus emptied himself not by divesting himself of equality with God, but by assuming the form of a slave.

The pre-existent, divine Jesus did not consider his status to be a reason to avoid the incarnation, but to embrace it. True humility meant using his status not for exploitation but for self-sacrificial service to others.

Ultimately, Jesus’ humility took him to the cross where he demonstrated the magnitude of his love for others.

Thus, Jesus did not reveal his character in spite of his divine nature but because of it. That is, it is the very nature of the divine to act in humble, self-sacrificial service.

As you prepare your hearts to virtually walk the way of the cross this upcoming week as you meditate upon Christ’s passion, remember his self-emptying as a model for living in relationship with others. A life well lived is a life lived with others’ best interest in mind.

So, empty yourself that you may then be filled with the spirit of God.

In the name of the God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Amen.