

Philippians 2:1-4

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

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Are we there yet? Are we at a point in this Lenten adventure that we can truly see the benefits of real, Christ-like humility? Sure, Paul was no Jesus, but he is among Jesus' most fervent proponents. He has had the original 'Emmaus Road' experience, and Paul's zeal for the cause of Christ knows no equal in these early days of change in and around the Mediterranean Basin. And here Paul calls for his friends in Philippi to be mindful of the things he has tried to teach them about Jesus' tendency toward love and selflessness.

Be of the same mind, says Paul - please note, this is not a call to sheep-like thinking - be of the same mind as Christ. Do things the way you imagine Jesus might. "In humility, regard others as better than yourselves...look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others." Christian love, in Paul's opinion and experience, is always directed outward. Jesus was not mindful of his own safety when he marched into Jerusalem and allowed the authorities to arrest him without so much as raising his voice. Be like that, says our friend Paul - but it's much, much harder than it looks.

If you need proof, just look around. Look in the mirror. We have been told, urged - even ordered - to take certain measures for the good of others...and what a struggle it is! Our defence is that we are social creatures. Our excuse is 'it's been a long winter...'

Our general cry is 'we're bored', or 'we need a change of scenery', but the truth is, we have trouble imagining the consequences of our self-indulgence. This virus is teaching us humility in a much more brutal way than Paul.

Stay apart - for the good of the community; for the sake of the compromised; for the sake of your neighbour the nurse or your cousin the doctor. Stay apart for the sake of the system and the good of humanity - that is the request. There is no appeal to religion or spirituality - except the one that I would make; in fact, I dare to suggest that it's what Jesus would do.

I've got no evidence for that, except the evidence offered by Paul, who writes as one convicted by an unshakable love that grabbed him and would not let him go his own way. In the name of that same love, I stay home and I film myself praying and talking and find them a poor substitute for the thing I was called to do...

But I was called to love the people of God in every circumstance, in the best way I could, and in this moment, during this extraordinary moment in time, love looks like phone calls and text messages and once-a-week video shorts and three-a-week emailed devotions.

It's not what I want. It's not what any of us want. But it is what WE ALL need.

Amen

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A prayer for the day:

Great and glorious God;

Walk us through those days when our mood matches the slate grey skies.

Remind us of the deep love that you have for this twisted, broken world we live in.

Show us, in the well-remembered stories of Jesus, what it means to look beyond ourselves.

Help us to care for one another in new and extravagant ways - just as you have always done.

Bring us to a new season of wonder - a new season of hope -

through the work of your Spirit and the witness of your Son. Amen

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Be assured of the Peace that God has promised, which is yours now and always through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen