

Palm Sunday—Sunday of the Passion
March 25, 2018

Text: Philippians 2:1-11

Theme: “Divine Thinking”

We all have the need to reach things and our reach certainly has its limits. The top shelf may be beyond our reach. So we let the taller person in the house reach it. And if it's beyond that person's reach then the step stool. When painting, again we can only reach so high. We can seek a taller painter. We could use stilts like sheetrock finishers use. Or we could screw one of these into the end of our roller, an extension. And if we get beyond the reach of this one we can go to this one. When the extension gets to be this long it's hard to see the details of our work.

Reach can only reach so far. We are limited in our reach. We are limited in intellect, in strength, and in availability. We need help in that which we do not know, added strength in lifting that rock that is too heavy for us. We need an additional body to be at the event as we cannot be in two places at one time.

Overestimating our reach is not helpful. We are tempted to overreach in self-importance and ability. We may try to reach up with one hand to raise self and push down with the other to diminish our neighbor. The results are not good. We do have a problem with overreaching

And that is not new. The old nature is quite good at this bad practice. It's just the opposite of our Lord's teaching which we considered last week. Jesus told the Twelve not to be like the Gentiles, not those lording it over, throwing around authority. No, He said the great one would be the serving one (Mark 10:43). We get the same message through our Lord's apostles as we see here in our text today. “Do nothing from rivalry or conceit,

but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.” (Philippians 2:3) Paul had said pretty much the same thing before. “For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think.” (Romans 12:3) This instruction about lowliness is a tall order to fill.

We have been given so much, but we want it to be more. We would like to be seen as more important, want others to agree with our self-assessment of significance. I can illustrate that with these pipes. As you can see these pipes are different lengths. The length can represent our thinking on self-importance. The longer the pipe, the longer our supposed reach. We would hold it up, even elevate for others to see. It’s a little hard to keep it balanced (balancing it on upon palm). The longer the pipe, the harder to keep it balanced, and the higher we elevate it, the higher to keep it balanced. Now as we are elevated our self-importance, maybe the other hand is trying to knock down our neighbor’s importance. Pretty soon what we have is a pile and a mess.

Today is Palm Sunday, the Sunday of the Passion. All Jesus’ words about going up to Jerusalem and what would happen there is about to happen. There were those in Jerusalem who had plenty of reach when it came to power, but not as extensive as they thought. There were the chief priests who were under the leadership of the High Priests. All these were Sadducees. There were the scribes or teachers of the law. Many of these were Pharisees. All had this Messiah thing figured out.

The Sadducees for the most part didn’t need one and didn’t want one. The status quo was working out pretty well for them. The Pharisees did look for a coming anointed one. They could not but notice Jesus, noticed by his being noticed by the crowds. They took a good long look at Jesus. They heard his words and they saw his works. They could not deny his works. But often his words were quite troubling to them. He did not honor

the tradition of the fathers, even said it was made up man teaching. He called them to account for their hypocrisy. No, they could not deny his works. He had said that if they did not believe his words, then believe from his works (John 10:38). But they attributed his works to the devil. Yes, they had taken a good look and this could not be the Christ. This upstart from Galilee needed to be tossed aside.

We have these two drastically different groups in their outlooks but joining forces to deal with this Jesus. The problem was how and when for all the people held him to be a prophet. Was he beyond their reach? They would also need the help of Pilate. Pilate knew his reach was great. After all, he was Rome in this place. Any high thinking opposed to Roman interests would have to be brought low. He was the man to do it.

So this is the city with its powers that Jesus enters on this day. Those who followed Him, especially the apostles were likely fearful, anxious, but yet hopeful? It could be the time for Jesus to be in His glory. We remember James and John from last week wanting to extend their reach into that glory. Today Jesus enters and today events get off to a good start. “Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the king of Israel (John 12:13).” On this day Jesus shows His reach by cleansing the temple, quite a challenge to the authorities who seem to be at a loss as to what to do (Mark 11:18, Luke 19:47, 48). There is the voice of the crowds singing His praises, the children, even God speaks from heaven about glory (John 12: 28). The week unfolds; there are confrontations and challenges from the Jewish leadership, but Jesus is the one who comes out on top. Jesus teaches much. He speaks parables about the coming kingdom of God. It is all about to happen? Is the longer stretch of glory almost within reach?

It's time for lowered thinking. God's law brings that about. It also works with the unbeliever. The law written in the heart can bring low. It becomes evident that life is not

working out so well. What one thought was within reach, maybe even held for a moment, is gone. The conscience says there is right and wrong, good and evil. It is obvious all are not getting along. There is much strife, turmoil, disruption. The conscience, imperfect though it is, accuses, brings guilt. God's revealed law puts the problem right out there. It is disobedience against God's will, the way He has given to live in this world.

For the believer God's Word of the law throughout the Scripture brings reflection and remorse. I have thought of myself more highly than I ought. I have looked to my own affairs and thought little of helping with the affairs of others. I'm not talking about getting into someone else's business to bring them down. I'm speaking of a brother or sister in Christ first of all, or really anyone who has a need that I'm aware of and I could help. But no, not me, I've done my share, let someone else step up. It's the old nature within always trying to break out in self-importance, selfishness, the impulse not to walk in godliness, but godiness—I'm the authority here; I have the power; I'm the knower of good and evil. The temptation to be overestimate your reach is great, ask James and John, or Peter, or any of the apostles, even Paul.

The high reach attempts of the apostles are shot down. Last week Jesus quickly shot down the words about false constructs of greatness. This week we will see the "success" of the enemies of Jesus. It will happen as He has said. He is delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, condemned to die, and handed over the Gentiles, that main Gentile being Pilate. His enemies had him, finally, where they wanted him. Pilate had a problem in front of him that he would rather not have, but there stood this man. He reminded Jesus that he was the authority, within his reach to release Jesus or to crucify him. Jesus told him that he had no authority other than that which was given to him from above (John 19:10-11).

The authorities think they have this, all in control, finally. In actuality, The Authority has this. Jesus will be lifted up as He says in our Gospel lesson. It will bring glory to the Father as His will is being carried out. It was the will of the Father to make His Son the sin offering. The lifting up of Jesus is the death of the self-lifting attempts of the apostles.

The One lifted up is the One higher than the Highest. It is the Christ. It is the LORD. This is the One in very nature, the form of God, the I AM. But He comes down to us. In this One the fullness of the deity dwells in bodily form. He gives some glimpses of that divinity through His words and works. But He did not come to put divinity on display, not a thing to be grasped, no, He comes in the form of servant, the likeness of men, human form. Someone seeing Him would not say, “Hey, I think that’s God.” “He had no form or majesty that we should look at Him, no beauty that we should desire Him.” (Isaiah 53:2) He came down in obedience, obedience unto death, even death on a cross.

This man is lifted up on that cross, but this man is so much more than a man as even some of those witnessing His execution will proclaim (Matthew 27:54). This is God who came down to us, not a powerful man really in tune with God, not an angel, not even some sort of super being created by God—this is God Almighty. Now Paul tells this One who endured the cross has been exalted and given the name above all names, a name at which every knee must bow and every tongue confess Jesus is LORD.

God works the highest good in this one crucified, dead and buried, now raised up and ascended. He is the universal answer to the universal problem. Forgiveness is the answer and sin is the problem. Those who look to Him in faith are freed from the pit of damnation, death, and despair.

We, the baptized, have been buried and raised with Him, joined to Him. We have been made new. We have been freed from the slavery of too high thinking of self. We look around, scope out our neighbor's need. "How can I help today?" It may be a need you already know of but have been waiting for someone else to do. Remember we God's workmanship to put our hands to those good works that God has prepared beforehand for us to do. We are thankful for those who help us.

It all works out divinely. We are the body of Christ, those made to join together not to know down or around. Our Lord Jesus did endure the cross scorning its shame and has sat down at the right hand of God. He works through us brother and sister. We, the church are the only body He has in this world. We rejoice to follow in the serving humility of our LORD. Such low thinking is quite divine. For Jesus' sake. Amen