

"FIRST"  
PHILIPPIANS 2:1-5  
EIGHTEENTH S. A. PENTECOST  
MESSIAH, BOERNE  
OCTOBER 1, 2023

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY  
SPIRIT. AMEN.

READ TEXT: PHIL 2:1-5

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST:

AN ATTITUDE THAT CHARACTERIZES MANY SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE  
IN OUR SOCIETY IS SINGLE-MINDEDNESS. FOR EXAMPLE, TED  
TURNER, THE FORMER CABLE TELEVISION MAGNATE, HAD A SIGN ON  
HIS DESK THAT READ: "EITHER LEAD, FOLLOW, OR GET OUT OF THE  
WAY!" BY FOLLOWING SUCH A MOTTO IN HIS LIFE, MR. TURNER  
REACHED THE HEIGHTS OF HIS PROFESSION AND CONTINUES TO HAVE  
AN INFLUENCE IN THE FIELDS OF BUSINESS AND COMMUNICATION.  
IN FACT, SUCH A SINGLE-MINDED ATTITUDE CHARACTERIZES MOST  
LEADERS IN OUR SOCIETY.

OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST HAD SINGLENESS OF MIND AND  
SPIRIT AS HE CARRIED OUT THE GREAT WORK HIS HEAVENLY FATHER  
HAD GIVEN HIM: "TO SEEK AND TO SAVE THE LOST" (LK 19:10  
ESV). THE FATHER SENT HIS ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON INTO THE WORLD  
TO BE THE LEADER OF HIS CHOSEN AND ELECT PEOPLE. BUT IN  
CONTRAST TO THE OFTEN SELF-CENTERED AND ARROGANT EXAMPLES  
GIVEN US BY LEADERS IN THE FIELDS OF BUSINESS, POLITICS,  
SPORTS, AND ENTERTAINMENT, JESUS LED BY BEING THE SERVANT

OF ALL. JESUS SAID TO HIS DISCIPLES: "WHOEVER WANTS TO BE GREAT AMONG YOU MUST BE YOUR SERVANT, AND WHOEVER WANTS TO BE FIRST MUST BE YOUR SLAVE—JUST AS THE SON OF MAN DID NOT COME TO BE SERVED, BUT TO SERVE, AND TO GIVE HIS LIFE AS A RANSOM FOR MANY" (MT 20:26-28).

JESUS HAD PRIORITIES IN HIS LIFE, AND HIS NUMBER ONE PRIORITY WAS TO SERVE GOD, THE HOLY TRINITY—THE FATHER, THE SON, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT—BY SERVING THE HUMAN RACE. IN SERVICE TO HIS FATHER AND OUT OF LOVE FOR HUMANKIND, HE EMPTIED HIMSELF OF ALL DIVINE RIGHT AND PRIVILEGE, BECAME A HUMAN BEING LIKE YOU AND ME, AND SUFFERED THE MOST DEGRADING KIND OF EXECUTION IN OUR PLACE: DEATH BY CRUCIFIXION (PHIL 2:6-8). JESUS CHRIST, THE LAMB OF GOD, OFFERED HIS BLAMELESS LIFE AS AN ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICE TO GOD ON THE CROSS SO THAT YOU AND I MIGHT RECEIVE FULL FORGIVENESS OF ALL OUR SINS AND HAVE A PART IN THE GLORIES OF HIS HEAVENLY KINGDOM. WE LOVE BECAUSE HE FIRST LOVED US (1 JN 4:19). WE SERVE BECAUSE HE FIRST SERVED US. WE PUT JESUS FIRST IN OUR LIFE BECAUSE HE PUT US FIRST IN HIS LIFE.

HERE AT MESSIAH LUTHERAN CHURCH, WE ARE PART OF JESUS' FAMILY, THE HOLY FAMILY OF THE TRIUNE GOD. OUR RELATIONSHIP IS WITH GOD, THE FATHER AND THE SON AND THE

HOLY SPIRIT, WHO DWELLS WITHIN US, AND WE LIVE SECURELY IN THIS RELATIONSHIP, FOR IT IS A RELATIONSHIP OF LOVE. BECAUSE THE FATHER LOVED THE INHABITED WORLD SO MUCH, HE SENT HIS ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON, JESUS CHRIST, TO REDEEM IT (JN 3:16). JESUS SHOWED US THE FULL EXTENT OF HIS FATHER'S LOVE BY TAKING THE SINS OF THE WHOLE HUMAN RACE UPON HIMSELF, SUFFERING, AND DYING IN OUR PLACE. NOW AS OUR FATHER'S BELOVED CHILDREN, WE RESPOND TO HIS LOVE BY LIVING IN OBEDIENCE TO HIS COMMANDMENTS. "AND THIS IS [GOD'S] COMMAND," WRITES ST. JOHN, "TO BELIEVE IN THE NAME OF HIS SON, JESUS CHRIST, AND TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER" (1 JN 3:23).

LIKE JESUS, WE NEED PRIORITIES IN OUR LIFE, TOO. THAT CHRIST IS TO BE THE ONLY ONE IN WHOM WE PUT OUR TRUST IS ILLUSTRATED BY THE FOLLOWING HUMEROUS STORY. ONCE WHILE MARK TWAIN WAS LECTURING IN UTAH, A MORMON ACQUAINTANCE BEGAN TO ARGUE WITH HIM OVER THE SUBJECT OF POLYGAMY, THAT IS, THE PRACTICE OF A MAN BEING MARRIED TO MORE THAN ONE WIFE AT A TIME. AFTER A LONG AND HEATED DEBATE, THE MORMON FINALLY SAID, "CAN YOU FIND FOR ME A SINGLE PASSAGE OF SCRIPTURE THAT FORBIDS POLYGAMY?" "CERTAINLY," REPLIED TWAIN SARCASTICALLY, "NO MAN CAN SERVE TWO MASTERS."

YOU SEE, WE NEED TO SET UP PRIORITIES IN OUR LIVES. WE NEED TO MAKE SOME TOUGH DECISIONS, AND THEN TO LIVE ACCORDING TO THEM. WHO WILL OUR MASTER BE? AS CHRISTIANS

OUR PRIORITY IN LIFE *MUST* BE TO SERVE JESUS CHRIST ALONE,  
BECAUSE *ONLY* THROUGH JESUS CHRIST CAN WE COME TO THE  
FATHER, *ONLY* THROUGH JESUS CAN WE RECEIVE THE FORGIVENESS,  
LIFE, AND SALVATION THE FATHER PROMISES, *ONLY* THROUGH JESUS  
CAN WE LIVE OUR LIFE TO THE FULL, NOW AND FOREVER.

THE PRIORITY IN *JESUS'* LIFE WAS TO SERVE HIS FATHER BY  
SERVING US. *OUR* PRIORITY IN LIFE *MUST* BE TO SERVE GOD BY  
WORSHIPING HIS SON, JESUS CHRIST, AS OUR LORD AND SAVIOR,  
AND SERVING HIM ALONE. JESUS NEEDS TO BE FIRST IN YOUR  
LIFE AND MINE, AND WE SHOW THAT CHRIST IS FIRST IN OUR LIFE  
BY STRIVING TO IMITATE HIM—TO LIVE AS HE LIVED, TO LOVE AS  
HE LOVED, AND TO SERVE AS HE SERVED. IT WAS JESUS' REGULAR  
CUSTOM TO WORSHIP GOD IN THE ASSEMBLY OF BELIEVERS (LK  
4:16). WE ALSO NEED TO BE IN REGULAR WORSHIP—NOT "REGULAR"  
AS IN ONCE A MONTH (OR LESS), BUT IN REGULAR *WEEKLY* WORSHIP  
ATTENDANCE—AND TO GET CLOSE TO HIM BY REGULARLY ATTENDING  
SUNDAY SCHOOL AND BIBLE CLASS. WE NEED TO COME INTO  
CONTACT WITH CHRIST REGULARLY THROUGH HEARING AND STUDYING  
GOD'S WORD AND RECEIVING THE SACRAMENT OF CHRIST'S BODY AND  
BLOOD. *THAT'S BASIC* TO THE CHRISTIAN LIFE-STYLE.

WHEN WE COME INTO CONTACT WITH CHRIST THROUGH HIS WORD  
AND SACRAMENTS, THE PRIORITIES IN OUR LIFE ARE *ACTUALIZED*.  
FOR EXAMPLE, CONSIDER A BOX OF MATCHES. EACH MATCH HAS THE  
POTENTIAL TO PRODUCE LIGHT AND WARMTH, BUT UNLESS THE MATCH

COMES INTO CONTACT WITH THE ROUGH STRIP ON THE MATCHBOX,  
ITS POTENTIAL REMAINS HIDDEN, UNTAPPED, LOST. SO, EACH  
CHRISTIAN HAS THE POTENTIAL TO PRODUCE LIGHT AND WARMTH.  
JESUS SAYS, "YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD. . . . LET  
YOUR LIGHT SHINE BEFORE MEN, THAT THEY MAY SEE YOUR GOOD  
DEEDS AND PRAISE YOUR FATHER IN HEAVEN" (MT 5:14, 16).

ONLY THROUGH CONTACT WITH CHRIST IN WORD AND SACRAMENT IS  
THE POTENTIAL IN THE CHRISTIAN TO GIVE WARMTH, LIGHT, AND  
LIFE REALIZED OR ACTUALIZED.

WHEN WE COME INTO CONTACT WITH CHRIST THROUGH HIS WORD  
AND WORSHIP, CHRIST REALIZES OR ACTUALIZES THE POTENTIAL IN  
EACH OF US. WE LEARN OF HIM THROUGH THE WORD. WE  
EXPERIENCE HIS GRACE IN THE SACRAMENTS. WE BEGIN TO  
IMITATE HIM IN OUR LIVES. WE LEARN TO THINK HIS THOUGHTS,  
TO LIVE AS HE LIVED, AND TO LOVE AS HE LOVED. OUR  
IMITATION OF CHRIST ALLOWS US TO PUT CHRIST *FIRST* IN OUR  
LIVES AND TO WORK TOGETHER IN SINGLENES OF MIND AND SPIRIT  
FOR GOD'S KINGDOM.

ONE OF THE WAYS TO PUT CHRIST FIRST IN OUR LIVES FINDS  
EXPRESSION IS IN THE BIBLICAL PRACTICE OF FIRST-FRUITS  
GIVING AND TITHING. THE WORD *TITHE* MEANS LITERALLY *TENTH*,  
AS IN *TEN PERCENT*. WHEN YOU SET ASIDE A TENTH OF YOUR  
INCOME FOR THE LORD AND THE WORK OF HIS CHURCH, YOU ARE  
EXPRESSING IN A CONCRETE WAY THAT CHRIST IS FIRST IN YOUR

LIFE. YOU MAY ALSO CHOSE UNDER THE LORD'S GUIDANCE AND BLESSING TO GIVE A GREATER OR LESSER PERCENTAGE TO THE LORD. WHATEVER THE PERCENTAGE AND AMOUNT YOU CHOSE TO GIVE MAY BE, WHEN YOU PUT CHRIST JESUS *FIRST* IN YOUR LIFE, YOUR OFFERING WILL BE WELL-PLEASING TO THE LORD.

IN A COUPLE WEEKS YOU WILL BE RECEIVING A LETTER ALONG WITH A PLEDGE CARD TO BE TURNED IN ON THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN OCTOBER, OCTOBER 22<sup>nd</sup>, OUR *COMMITMENT SUNDAY*. YOU WILL BE ASKED TO GIVE CHEERFULLY AND SACRIFICIALLY IN SUPPORT OF THE MISSION AND MINISTRY OF MESSIAH LUTHERAN CHURCH, YOUR CHURCH AND MY CHURCH. I'M REMINDED OF THE STORY OF AN OFFICE THAT DECIDED TO GIVE A FAREWELL LUNCHEON FOR A RETIRING COLLEAGUE. AS THEY PREPARED TO LEAVE FOR THE RESTAURANT, THEY DISCOVERED THE GIANT BALLOON THEY HAD PURCHASED FOR THE GUEST-OF-HONOR WOULDN'T FIT IN THEIR CAR, SO THEY DECIDED TO HOLD IT OUT THE WINDOW AS THEY DROVE TO THE LUCHEON. THEY WEREN'T QUITE PREPARED FOR THE GLARES THEY RECEIVED FROM PASSERSBY AS THEY FOLLOWED A LONG LINE OF CARS IN FRONT OF THEM. ONLY WHEN THE LINE TURNED THE CORNER DID THEY SEE THAT THEIR CAR WAS AT THE BACK OF A FUNERAL PROCESSION. ALL THEY COULD DO WAS HOLD ON TO THE BALLOON WITH ITS FAREWELL MESSAGE: "GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN." WHEN WE BRING OUR COMMITMENTS OF TITHES AND OFFERINGS TO THE LORD ON THE 22<sup>ND</sup> OF THIS MONTH, LET'S SHOW

THAT, ALTHOUGH OUR LORD JESUS MAY BE GONE FROM OUR SIGHT,  
HE HAS NOT BEEN FORGOTTEN IN OUR DAILY LIVES.

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST, IN 1884 THE TOWN COUNCIL OF  
CALAIS, FRANCE, COMMISSIONED AUGUSTE RODIN TO SCULPT THE  
"BURGHERS OF CALAIS" IN ORDER TO COMMEMORATE SIX PROMINENT  
CITIZENS WHO HAD SAVED THE CITY BY OFFERING THEIR LIVES TO  
THE CONQUERING BRITISH IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY (1346-47).  
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL, HONOR MEANT PLACING THE  
SCULPTED GROUP ON A HIGH PEDESTAL, BUT RODIN HAD A  
DIFFERENT VIEW. HE WANTED THE "BURGHERS" AT GROUND LEVEL  
SO THAT VIEWERS WOULD BE DRAWN INTO THE ANGUISH AND FEAR HE  
SCULPTED ON THE HEROES' FACES. RODIN'S WISHES PREVAILED,  
AND TODAY YOU CAN LOOK THE "BURGHERS" STRAIGHT IN THE FACE  
AT THE HIRSCHORN SCULPTURE GARDEN IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

OF COURSE, COMING DOWN FROM A PEDESTAL IS WHAT JESUS  
DID WHEN,

BEING IN VERY NATURE GOD, [HE] DID NOT CONSIDER  
EQUALITY WITH GOD SOMETHING TO BE GRASPED, BUT MADE  
HIMSELF NOTHING, TAKING THE VERY NATURE OF A SERVANT,  
BEING MADE IN HUMAN LIKENESS. (VV 6-7)

THAT'S PART OF GOD'S PLAN FOR OUR SALVATION. IT'S ALSO  
PART OF GOD'S PLAN THAT "IN CHRIST" WE MIGHT BE RAISED TO  
GOD, BUT NOT BEFORE WE FIRST COME DOWN FROM OUR OWN  
"PEDESTALS," HAVING THE SAME ATTITUDE AS THAT OF CHRIST  
JESUS. THAT ATTITUDE IS A GIFT OF GOD'S GRACE, WORKED IN

OUR HEARTS BY THE HOLY SPIRIT AS WE WORSHIP HIM, HEAR AND STUDY HIS WORD, RECEIVE NEW LIFE IN THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY BAPTISM, AND PARTAKE OF HIS TRUE BODY AND BLOOD FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS IN THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR. THUS, GOD ENABLES US TO IMITATE CHRIST IN ALL ASPECTS OF OUR LIFE, INCLUDING OUR FIRST-FRUITS GIVING. MAY GOD ENABLE YOU TO PUT CHRIST *FIRST* IN YOUR LIFE, FOR WHEN WE PUT CHRIST FIRST IN OUR LIFE, THEN WE CAN TRULY MOVE FORWARD IN OUR SERVICE TO GOD AND HIS KINGDOM. AMEN.