

The Model of Unity: The Mind of Christ [Philippians 2:1-11]

Today's Memory Verses: PHILIPPIANS 2:3-5: *“Do 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. ⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus...”*

Have the mind of Christ. Some versions say, “the attitude of Christ.” Today I submit that, whatever it means, it is “The Biblical Model for Unity”

I've shared stories from my days as student pastor in Waynoka, in NW Oklahoma, almost in the panhandle. The easiest way to explain how to get there is to go to the end of the world and turn right.

But there's one event that brings people from all over the world to that remote, dusty little town: the annual Rattlesnake Roundup. People go into the sand hills and *hunt* rattlesnakes—bring 'em back alive! Some even *catch* 'em barehanded!

On the first weekend after Easter that little town of about 950 people will see up to 40,000 people come and go! Motels and RV parks are booked hundred miles in every direction. Most come for the festivities... A carnival north of town; a bandstand with Country Bands playing constantly; arts and crafts booths everywhere; food booths... all selling, what else: rattlesnake meat (tastes like chicken!)

But some folks come for the hunt. It started out of necessity. Ranchers were losing cattle to rattlesnake bites—especially in the spring. So, the cowboys went out every spring to *kill* rattlesnakes (which seems smarter, to me.)

Then, somebody came up with the idea of putting a bounty on the rattlesnakes: whoever brought in the most snakes (dead, of course) got a big bonus, come payday. And they'd make hatbands, and belts, from the skins.

Somewhere along the line—you know how cowboys are—it became more *macho* to catch the rattlesnakes alive; and the whole thing just got out of hand.

Some hunt with sophisticated equipment: long poles with wire loops and triggers so you can catch 'em ten feet out; put 'em in metal cages. But “real men” catch 'em barehanded and put 'em in a tow sack!

Back in town, they dump 'em in a pen and—dumbest thing I ever saw—“Bubba” gets in there with them! Who knows how—or why—he gets in there; but, the snakes are as afraid of him as I am of them! They hug the edges of the pen—a slithering pile of grey and brown spaghetti. He has a pole with a metal hook on one end, and if a snake starts to crawl his way, he uses the hook to flip it back onto the pile.

But, here's how “real men” catch a rattlesnake (so I'm told): first, you use a stick to pin the snake's head to the ground. Then you reach down and take hold of the snake, just behind its head, and pick it up. You see, if you're holding the snake just behind its head, it can't turn its head and bite you. Then you put the snake in a

burlap bag, throw it over your shoulder, and go look for another snake.

But, here's the secret: once you take hold of the snake, don't let go except to drop it into the bag. Which brings us to the heart of our text today:

(PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11 NRSV)

⁵ *Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,*

⁶ *who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,*

⁷ *but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.*

And being found in human form,

⁸ *he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of*

death—even death on a cross.

⁹ *Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,*

¹⁰ *so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*

¹¹ *and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

This probably was an early Christian hymn; and it describes a two-sided action on the part of Christ. First, "he *emptied* himself;" second, he "took on the form of a servant." The dual action: "Letting Go and Taking Hold".

He emptied himself—he "let go"—of the form of God; and he "took hold" of the form of a servant, and was found in human form.

The Messiah was expected to ride into Jerusalem on a white horse, with full armor, sword and shield, leading a victorious army: bugles blaring, banners flying. He'd overthrow the Romans, be clad in purple and crowned "King of the World."

Christ "let go" of that image—and "took hold" of a manger. He *did* ride into Jerusalem; but on a donkey, surrounded by children, not an army. And he clad himself with a towel, and washed his disciples' feet. And his crown was made of thorns.

They would have crowned him king. He let go of that. He let go of status, and took hold of mutuality—he ate with sinners and publicans. He let go of God-ness; and took hold of servanthood. And it's important to understand how he did that.

In our text one particular word is critical: Christ "...emptied himself and took on the form of a servant." If you're reading *The Living Bible*, you'll find: "...he took on the disguise of a servant." That's totally wrong and is close to Gnosticism—one of the first heresies in Christianity.

The word in the original language of the New Testament is μορφή (**mor' fay**). It's the root of the English word, "metamorphosis"—a process in which a caterpillar crawls out on a limb and spins a cocoon. And in that cocoon doesn't put on a butterfly disguise; he *becomes* a butterfly. The essence changes! He "lets go" of caterpillar-ness, and "takes hold" of butterfly-ness.

In that same way Christ "let go" of the form—the μορφή—of God, and "took hold" of the form—the μορφή—of a servant. In the creation we were made "like

God"—in the image of God; in the Incarnation, God became "like us"—the Word became flesh." And it's important for us to understand why he did that.

I like "Roadrunner" cartoons. I love the way he always evades the coyote's tricks. But the one I really identify with is the coyote. I know how it feels to have all your best plans blow up in your face. I can identify. I can empathize.

When Christ let go of Godness, he took hold of humanness. He empathized

It's important for us to "identify" with each other. Alcoholics, children and spouses of alcoholics, divorcees, children of broken homes, rape victims, parents who've lost children.... All these people and many others know their healing is built on "identification:" saying to each other, "I know how you feel; I've been through it! And because I'm recovering, you can, too."

In Christ, God empathized with humanity. God said, "I know how you feel; I've been through it!" Christ experienced fully our joys and sorrows; our frustrations and temptations, our successes and our failures. And, most important of all, he knows what it's like to face one's own death, and what is it to be human if not to face death?

Now, remember the rattlesnake hunt? Remember that I said, once you "take hold" of the rattlesnake, the important thing is: don't let go! The text says, "...being found in human form, he took hold of obedience, even unto death."

Once took hold of human form, Christ held on. He didn't bail out; he rode all the way to the end of the line; all the way to death. He identified completely with us; he died. Being found in human form, he was true to who he was.

And this may explain why some people have trouble accepting the total humanity of Jesus. Most people have no problem with the divinity of Christ; that's comfortable. We can use his divinity as an excuse: he was, after all, divine; I'm "only human."

But *if he's human*—if his feet touch the ground—there'll be footprints. And, if we follow those footprints—if *we're obedient*—those footprints may lead to places we don't want to go.

The key to it all is obedience. Obedience at this level is not a ritual or a creed or a doctrine. It is identifying—empathizing—with Christ. Paul calls it, "having the mind of Christ."

There is a final word I want us to consider. "*And being found in human form, ⁸he humbled himself and became obedient...*" "He humbled himself." Which brings us back to our memory verse, and the Model for Unity: "*Do 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. ⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus...*"

That's what unity looks like.

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I wonder how that would play out on Facebook.

In Jesus' name, amen.