



*The very best
and noblest attainment
in this life is to be silent
and let God work
and speak within.*

—Meister Eckhart

**TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
18 October 2020**

Opening Sentences—from *Meister Eckhart's Book of Secrets* by Mark S. Burrows and Jon S. Sweeney

This is God's Prayer

That you have my grace,
that you desire my grace,
that you at least desire to desire my grace,
given freely and abundantly;
that this will be your desire,
so that I might be born in you,
amen.

Opening Prayer

Source of Love,
draw me into your presence.

Through the intention
of my stillness and silence
help me descend
through the mire of thoughts and scurry of emotions
to find you waiting for me
deep within.

Open my heart and hands
to receive what comes this day.
Help me search for you woven
in and through all things.
Amen

Scripture Reading—Philippians 2:1–15

So far, we have reflected on two important messages from Paul to the followers of Jesus in Philippi. Paul's prayer to the koinonia (Christian community) is that their love will overflow more and more with first-hand knowledge of God's gracious activity and insight that is able to cut through competing demands and expectations. His hope is that they will live together in a way that reflects the gospel of Jesus Christ which, in summary, is that death leads to life.

In last week's section, Paul said that how we are as a community in seasons of suffering matters. When the going gets tough—such as Paul's years in prison or this year of pandemic for us—the church is called to shine out with hope and love.

Using a hymn of the early church, Paul will illuminate the nature of Christ-like love. In short, it is self-emptying love, love that regards others before self, love that is humble and self-giving. Let us listen to this portion of Paul's letter with the ear of our hearts.

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

who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient
to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth
and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Do all things without murmuring and arguing, so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world.

Going Deeper

In a lecture for Trinity University in Melbourne focused on contemplative prayer (namely silent meditation), Sarah Bachelard makes the following observation:

We the church proclaim the transforming power of Christ's self-emptying, his total self-entrustment to the Father. We proclaim our vocation to Christ-likeness. But our church tends not to exemplify a willingness to hand itself over, to let go its identity and security so as to receive its life back as gift. In fact, all too often, it's the reverse. We're anxiously preoccupied with survival and relevance, self-defensive about criticism and frightened of change; too often we seek to secure an identity by way of worldly power and oppressive social conformity. In truth, our church fails time and again to live from and entrust itself to the way of self-emptying and so fails to realise the possibility of the transformation it proclaims.

- What might a church that is self-emptying look like? How might we worship together? serve together? relate to one another?
- When have you experienced the church letting go of preoccupation and self-concern for the sake of love? What enabled this to happen in your observation?

Paul encourages the church in Philippi to “work out your own salvation.” In his book *Integrity*, Earl Palmer writes, “...our salvation is a gift that all of our work and working could never achieve. Nevertheless we work because that salvation is so total and so complete that it demands a practical, everyday response from us.”

- What is the work of salvation for you, your “practical, everyday response” to God’s grace?
- What fruits do you see your work bearing?

Silent Meditation

Meditation is the self-emptying that clears the pathless Path to God abiding within. It is the practice of letting go of thoughts and sensations—even “good” and positive ones. Rowan Williams once defined contemplative practices like meditation as “selfless attention to the Other that brings not death but life to self.”

To meditate, sit comfortably in a chair with your feet on the floor, hands gently in your lap, eyes lightly closed. It is helpful to use a sacred word for focus. John Main recommends Ma-ra-na-tha which means “Come, Lord” and can be broken up into four syllables of equal length. Repeat your word internally until it falls away. Return to the word whenever thoughts enter your mind. Don’t try to push thoughts and sensations away. They are not bad. Simply notice them but do not get distracted or become attached. Let them go and return to the sacred word.

Prayers of Intercession

Self-emptying God, who loves us all the way to the cross, help us to have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus. Remove our selfishness from us. Help us see you in the suffering and joy of others. Move us to care and love.

We pray: *help us to shine with your light in this world.*

In these anxious times, it is tempting to withdraw and withhold in fear of what might be. So, open our hearts through the stirring of compassion. Enable us to listen deeply to stories that are not our own. Bring us understanding and increase in us a desire for a more common good.

We pray: *help us to shine with your light in this world.*

Too often, O God, might makes right and wealth and power rule. Give us eyes to see those who are overlooked and neglected. Give us ears to hear those who are voiceless and silenced. May we tip the scales of justice in a new direction in the way we live as the Body of Christ.

We pray: *help us to shine with your light in this world.*

We bring to mind those we know who are doing it tough, those who are straining to make ends meet, those who despair and feel lost... We pray for one another... We pray for ourselves and our needs...

We pray: *help us to shine with your light in this world.*

Disciples' Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.

Blessing—Janet Morely

Christ in my mind that I may see what is true;
Christ in my heart that I may learn to be touched;
Christ in my hands that I may work with tenderness;
Christ in my soul that I may know my desire;
Christ in my arms that I may embrace without fear;
Christ in my face that I may shine with God.