

**Tuesday March 9**

**Philippians 2:1-11 – laying aside my ‘freedom’**

- 1 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,
- 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.
- 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.
- 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.
- 5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:
- 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
- 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.
- 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!
- 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,
- 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
- 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Today, let’s dwell one more time on the theme of REPENTANCE. Many people have been trying to comply with restrictions on our individual freedoms to help limit the spread of the pandemic. At the same time, there have been anti-lockdown protests in London, Belfast, across Europe and in other parts of the world. Do the protesters have real concerns that the rest of us should be aware of, or are they simply being selfish?

It’s important that if I’m willing, for a while, to lay aside up my freedom to go out and enjoy myself any way I wish, I need to make sure I know why I’m doing it. So here goes. Firstly, I’m doing it for the sake of others. As one Northern Ireland MLA said, ‘This is about us taking responsibility for one another’. That’s the nearest I’ve heard any politician come to the second great commandment: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’. Secondly, I’m thinking about who said that – Jesus, widely acknowledged beyond the Christian faith as a great teacher; in Islam he is the second greatest of all the prophets. But he is also the one whom Christians worship as God the Son, because the scriptures reveal him as far more than a great teacher, or even *the* greatest teacher of all time.

In the New Testament you find Paul’s letter to the Christians in Philippi. In chapter 2 he explains how their relationships with each should work: “Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. “ What follows shows us how his mind was working. Look at Jesus as our example, he was saying to them: Jesus was in very nature God, but, he went on “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. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!”

What does he mean by Jesus ‘making himself nothing’? However dimly I see through the mist to the glorious reality of this, it does mean that he gave up his position with his Father in heaven to come to live in our midst and then go to His death. For my sake – for all our sakes - he laid aside all that was His by right. Emily Elliott’s 19<sup>th</sup> century hymn, still a firm favourite in many churches, puts it beautifully. It starts like this:

‘Thou didst leave Thy throne and thy kingly crown / when thou camest to earth for me’

In due course, I shall look forward to taking up freedoms laid aside for a while. I'll go to church; I may even find myself leading a service or preaching. Let's continue to lay aside for a while some of our freedoms and stay with the restrictions. Like you, I hope it won't be for too much longer now.