



One Page Sermon

By Pastor Robb McCoy

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Worship Every Sunday at 9:30 AM

7th Sunday of Easter, Philippians 2:1-13; Paul shares the 'Christ Hymn'

Paul was writing to a community in turmoil. It was a group of people who were struggling to follow Christ in a world surrounded by civil religion. According to Bible Odyssey, "Philippi was reshaped by veteran settlement and colonization in the aftermath of the Roman civil wars that saw Octavian (Augustus) come to power. As the site in northeast Macedonia where the army of Brutus and Cassius was finally broken by the future emperor and Mark Antony at the Battle of Philippi in 42 B.C." This same article goes on to say that a second wave of retired soldiers settled in Philippi about 20 years later.

In other words, the city's cultural landscape was one that was deeply devoted to Rome and to the Emperor. It was a city entrenched in the worship of their former Emperor, Augustus. Subsequent Emperors after Augustus used titles such as Son of God, Savior of the World, and Lord of Lords.

Philippi, being a colony of retired soldiers and their families, who owed their status, land, and wealth to the military success of Augustus, was a stronghold of the Emperor Cult. Worship of Augustus and his descendants, Tiberius, and then Caligula, was rampant in the city.

It became a precarious place to live for a group of people who detested the worship of idols, who were dedicated to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and had come to believe that Jesus was the Son of God, the Savior of the World, and the Lord of Lords.

In a world surrounded by idols, and the economic and social advantages that came with bending their knee to Emperor, the fledgling community of Christ followers in Philippi were struggling. They were surrounded by a culture worshipping war and a Pax Romana that was enforced by crushing any dissent with resounding violence. They felt the tension of trying to be a "Good, obedient Roman" while also trying to follow the Way of Christ. Paul's letter gave them a plan.

Paul's letter to this struggling community is one that is timeless and timely as we dwell as Christ-followers in a world surrounded by idol worshippers. We live in a culture that worships war and violence. We build statues to warriors, create

movies dedicated to violence, and cling to weapons as our hope for security. For many, the answer to violent tragedies such as school shootings is more guns—more weapons in the hands of the good guys will prevent the deaths inflicted at the hands of the bad guys. Maybe that's true.

Yet we are a people dedicated to God who shared a vision with Isaiah, that there would be a time when "the swords will be beaten into plows, and the spears into pruning hooks." Weapons transformed into farm tools. That is the vision of God. And Paul, when encouraging this struggling community, reminded them of the nature of the Christ they claimed to follow. He actually reminded them of a song. He writes the words of a worship song—one in which the community was probably already familiar.

He pointed to their own art which they used in worship. "Though [Jesus] was in the form of God, he did not consider being equal with God something to exploit." (Philippians 2:6). Paul continues the song, which reminds the people that Jesus—who contained the ultimate power of the world, chose humility and obedience to God. And the song finishes by quoting Isaiah, declaring that "every knee shall bow and tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."

The way of Augustus was to get every knee to bend with violence and exploitation. The Way of Christ is to have every knee bend through humble service and love. The culture surrounding the Philippian Christians worshipped the victorious Emperor. Paul reminded the Christians to worship God, and the way to worship God was to be united in faith, generosity of spirit, and dedication to service. Paul's response to a community struggling to exist in a twisted culture: Love one another. Grow together. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling. Follow Christ by serving one another.

Remember Christ, who you claim to follow. Christ is the one who set aside power, who turned away from violence, and claimed the name Son of God through obedience to the one who would turn swords into plows and spears into pruning hooks.