

20 March 2016  
Palm / Passion Sunday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“The One Who Grasped Us”  
Text: Philippians 2:5-11

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

***He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.***

Why did St. Paul write that about Jesus? The sentence in the Epistle would have worked very well without it. Here's how it would sound without that line: ***Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God . . . made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.***

But he added this thought: ***He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.*** And he used a form of a word used no place else in the entire New Testament - the word for *grasped* - perhaps, thereby, indicating something utterly unique going on here.

So now let me read that line for you again, but this time, putting the emphasis in a different place, which maybe will help us understand and lead us in a direction to see what Paul is getting at here . . .

**HE did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.**

When you put the emphasis there, the thought, the focus, changes from the grasping to who before, someone before, who thought that equality with God was something to be grasped. Someone who Jesus is here the utter opposite of . . . and that was Adam.

In the Garden, satan had seduced Adam and Eve with this thought: that if they ate the forbidden fruit, they would *not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God* (Gen 3:4-5) . . . So they reached out and grasped the fruit. But it really wasn't the fruit they wanted - it was to be like God; ***equality with God.***

But Jesus, who is God - *God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God* (as we confess in the Nicene Creed), and the Son of God who *is equal to the Father with respect to His divinity* (as we confess in the Athanasian Creed) - didn't try to hold onto what He had from eternity, ***but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.*** He did the exact opposite of Adam, not striving for more, but giving up

what He had. And how far, how low, did He go? *And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

Adam grasped, Jesus gave. Adam was disobedient, Jesus obedient. That's how they were different. But they were not only different in life, they were also different in death - Adam deserved his death, Jesus didn't; Adam died as the penalty for his sin, Jesus died **to atone** for Adam's sin. And your sin. All *your* disobedience, all *your* grasping, too. That's what He grasped - you . . . and your sin, your death, and your hell. To undo what Adam did. To give you forgiveness and life in the midst of a world of sin and death.

That's the story we'll hear again in just a few moments now - how Jesus gave Himself for you. How He would not defend Himself, how He would not save Himself, but humble Himself for you and die for you.

For you, for me, for us, who are still grasping for equality with God. We do. When we want to judge what is right and wrong based upon what we think or believe instead of what God's Word teaches. When we want to be in control instead of trusting God His ways. When we doubt His love and think we could do better. When we expect God to conform to us instead of we to Him. Are those not all ways in which we, still today, are grasping for equality with God?

And so we prayed for God's help: *Mercifully grant that we may follow the example of His great humility and patience and be made partakers of His resurrection.*

How that is done first of all is by repentance. Humbling ourselves and admitting that *I am a poor, miserable grasper*. Grasping not only what belongs to others, not only what I should not have, but equality with God. And then humbly receiving what we could not and could never grasp for ourselves: the forgiveness of our sin and rebellion. Acknowledging that there is no justification for my sin, and that if I am to be justified, if I am to be raised from the death of my sin, it must come from outside of me, it must be given to me, by the One who was perfect and obedient and who died not for His own sin, but for my sin. And who now lives to give me life. That's the first way.

But then there is this too: having been made *partakers of His resurrection* in the forgiveness of our sin, we not only humble ourselves before God in repentance, we also humble ourselves before others in service. Living the new, resurrection life we have been given by laying down our lives for others. Forgiving, helping, loving, not to atone for our sins, but because that's what the One who has atoned for our sins has done for us. And that's what the new life He has given us looks like. Not a life of grasping for greatness, but humbly serving to make others great. That's Jesus. He is God - nothing to gain there, and so lowered Himself for us. And we are children of God, already forgiven, raised, justified, and set free - nothing to gain there, and so we can now lower ourselves in the same way for others. That is having the mind of Christ.

So at the beginning of the service today, we heard of how Jesus humbly entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey. We'll hear now how He humbly leaves Jerusalem carrying a cross. We heard at Christmas how humbly He was born, and we'll hear how in humility He dies. This is God for you.

And then later we'll hear also how Jesus has humbly come to us today in the bread and wine of His Supper - bread and wine that in, with, and under is His Body and Blood, for the forgiveness of our sin, the strengthening of our faith, and the resurrection and life we need. And instead of grasping for equality with God - which is really grasping at straws - He says: *grasp this*. Take and eat, Take and drink. Here I am for you. Here is what you need.

And so He who is very God, who humbled Himself and is now exalted on high, promises us the same - to exalt us, too. That as He is now where we are, that we be where He is. And that as we confess Him now, so we will confess Him forever.

So now we will confess our faith and we'll hear the story again, and as you do, marvel. Marvel at the One who is God not grasp and hold onto His equality with God, but humble Himself, make Himself nothing, and grasp you instead. And marvel that through death to life eternal, He is not letting you go.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.