

1 April 2012
Palmarum / Passion Sunday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“He Made Himself Nothing”
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 made Himself nothing.

Did you hear that? Oh, you’ve heard it before. You hear those words from Philippians every year on this Sunday. But did you hear them? Or did you skip over them; not pay much attention to them? Well think about them! Now. For a moment.

He made Himself nothing.

Who? Jesus? Yes. But even more. The Son of God. The Creator of the universe. The Almighty. The One who holds all things in His hands. The One who keeps the stars in place and the planets in their orbits and takes care of worlds we don’t even know are out there. The One who feeds you and I, knows when a sparrow falls to the ground, and how many hairs on are your head at any given moment in time. The One who from eternity is at the right hand of the Father. The One who knit you together in your mother’s womb. The One who gives you breath, has numbered your days, and is caring for you even now. The One who knows all things, who commanded the Flood, sent ten plagues upon Egypt, divided the Red Sea, gave His people water from a rock and fed them with manna in the desert, and topples kings and kingdoms with a breath. The One who commands the heavenly army of angels. *The only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God.*

He made Himself nothing.

We don’t want to be nothing. We want to be something! Someone people know, someone people look up to, someone with name recognition, someone important. That will give us value, we think. We’re afraid of being nothing. For we think nothing means of no value, worthless, forgotten. We don’t want that. And oh, the lengths we will go to not be nothing! Which makes this verse today all the more remarkable.

He made Himself nothing.

How? ***By taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.***

He made Himself nothing.

The word used there is the word *ekenosen*, which means *He emptied Himself*. Some Bibles translate it that way, and so its important to know what that means, *and what it doesn't mean*. It doesn't mean that the Son of God left His godness behind in heaven when He became a man. It doesn't mean He left His power and glory in heaven when He became a man. It doesn't mean that when He was arrested and manhandled by the Roman soldiers, when He stood before Pilate, and when He hung on the cross, He was helpless and couldn't do anything about it. He *could* have. Easily. The same Son of God who healed folks of every disease and sickness, who knew the thoughts and hearts of men, who could command all creation by His Word, whose glory shone in His transfiguration, and who had power over death - that is the Jesus of the Passion. The Son of God who willingly didn't use all that power when it came time to save Himself. ***He made Himself nothing.***

Yet perhaps we could go even farther than that, if that's possible - He made Himself less than nothing. Taking upon Himself the sin of the world, He was the greatest sinner ever. Whoever you usually think has that title, the most vilest person you can think of, you're wrong - it's Jesus. He is the worst idolater, the worst unbeliever, the worst hater, the worst scoundrel, the worst murderer, the worst adulterer, the worst thief, the worst liar, the worst cheat, the worst everything . . . because He's got all your sins and all my sins and all the sin of all the people out there, on Him.

Unfair? No. He took them. He wanted them. So that they would be on Him and not on you. So that they would be held against Him and not against you. So that He would be forsaken for them and die for them and not you.

He made Himself nothing.

The king becomes a servant. God becomes man. The One subject to none makes Himself subject to all. The author of life dies. The glory of God is hung on a cross.

Why? ***For you.***

That's what this day, and all this week, is all about. With all that you hear today, all that you hear this week, the thought to put in your mind is this: He did all this for me. ***For me.*** Not just for the world. ***For me. He made Himself nothing, to make you***

something. To make you a child of God. And that was worth it. For the Father, that was worth sending His Son. For Jesus, that was worth all the pain and agony and death. You were worth it. You may not be anything in anybody's eyes; maybe not even in your own eyes. *But you are in God's eyes.*

Maybe you think you're nothing and that's why you spend so much time trying to make yourself something. But there is simply nothing greater you can do or make yourself than what Jesus has made you: *a child of God.* That gives you more value than anything else in this world. And God has done that. He said it to you when you were baptized: *You are now My beloved Son.* And so it is true. God doesn't lie.

That's why **He made Himself nothing.** That's why the cross. That's how much He loves you.

And in the Collect of the Day we prayed earlier, we prayed that God would enable us *to follow the example of His great humility and patience.* You know what that means? That He would help us, as St. Paul wrote, **have this mind among ourselves.** That we, too, having everything, would *make ourselves nothing.* For others.

That we not expect and demand, but give. That we not walk on others, but lift them up. That we not seek satisfaction, but forgive. Can you imagine such a world? To do that you might have to bear a cross or two. That's not easy. But if so, you're in good company. With the One who made Himself nothing for you. Because He did, you can. Because He did, God has exalted Him, and you are exalted with Him. On the cross, all that is yours is His; and now in His resurrection, all that is His is yours. Everything. His Sonship, His kingdom, His life. All yours. A gift He gives not just once, but over and over again.

A gift He gives as you again come to His Table today, as the One who **made Himself nothing** now *makes Himself your food.* That eating His body and drinking His blood, you receive Him and His gifts and His life and His love. That as you have freely received, so you now freely give.

He made Himself nothing.

Hear that story now as you hear His Passion. And through it all, keep telling yourself one thing: **for me.** He did this **for me.** This is His love **for me.**

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