**Practicing Solidarity – Philippians 2:2-11**

Let’s pray.

Holy Spirit,

You are here with us. May we recognize your presence, trust in your comfort, your hope and the transformation you are working in us. Use my words now to communicate something of your truth and your purposes in this world and in the lives of your followers.

Amen.

Having been part of leading teenagers in the experience of probably about eight “30 Hour Famines”, let me just say that I admire the heck out of the youth and adults for choosing to participate in this event…it’s not an easy one. So, now that you’re nearly done and I’m going to try to - very briefly - explain to all of these other folks **WHY what you are doing is so important…and how it’s actually a very Christ-like thing to do.**

The key word for this evening is **solidarity**, because as you chose to go without food for 30 hours and experience the feeling of being hungry, you also learn something about those who experiences the effects of hunger elsewhere in the world. There’s an important difference though, you chose your “famine” (which is actually a fast), they did not choose theirs. However, the bodily experience of going without food, even for a short time, and of learning about the problem of global hunger and malnutrition even in this country, is that you are beginning to establish a bond based on empathy and compassion for those who suffer. This bond is one that ought to motive you, to spark in you the desire to see change happen so that the social and economic conditions that result in suffering can be eradicated.

*Now, here’s the thing:* The practice of solidarity is **never** complete, and it is the ongoing task of people who worship and follow a God whose ultimate demonstration of love and compassion was to take on flesh and experience firsthand the suffering of the hungry, the sick, the rejected and the despised.

In our passage for tonight, in Philippians 2 we find what is sometimes called ***“The Christ Hymn”*** – it is the centerpiece of Paul’s letter to the church in Philippi and it serves both as a confession of who he understands Christ to be and also as an illustration of choosing to relinquish one’s status and privilege in order to see the good of others.

Starting in verse 5 Paul says, *“Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus: Though he was in the form of God, he did not consider being equal with God something to exploit. But he emptied himself by taking the form of a slave and by becoming like human beings”.* For Paul, it is clear that the incarnation – that is, when God came to earth in human form, as an infant, living (very likely) as a peasant, and as a Jew under Roman occupation – the incarnation is the ultimate act of solidarity. At act based on love that manifested itself through acts of healing, forgiveness and challenging authorities both religious and political.

It is likely that the church was already familiar with this hymn-like confession before Paul wrote it in his letter to them. Some scholars believe that it is one of the earliest examples of the church’s worship, reminding the Philippians of God’s willingness to accept the limitations of flesh and blood for the sake of establishing a bond of solidarity with all humanity. It is this kind of solidarity that the apostle Paul is calling the Church to adopt, to emulate and to practice in their own lives.

Throughout Jesus’ life, Paul says, we are given *the* example of how to relate to one other, how to reflect the Divine in our human form. And by living in solidarity with those who suffering greatest in our world, we are to be conduits of love, joy, peace, compassion, forgiveness, and mercy. Qualities that, not just make us more pleasant people to live with, but actually form the basis of faithful, ongoing solidarity with those who regularly experience abuse rather than love; sadness rather than joy; judgment rather than compassion; resentment rather than forgiveness; and punishment rather than mercy.

I mentioned at the beginning that solidarity only begins with the bond of unity around a common experience or cause, like the “30 Hour Famine” or a Mission Trip. But, it goes beyond that. It is a lifelong commitment to the Way of the Incarnate Christ that requires maintenance and intentionality. So, I’m going to finish by giving you four actions that disciples of Christ can do as they grow in their faith and in their solidarity with those that Jesus once called “the least of these”.

First, we must…

1. develop meaningful relationships with people across lines of difference. For many people, this will require both a new way of seeing and thinking about the world and a real **transformation** of habits and lives. A new perspective rooted in solidarity requires a radical act of *metanoia*, this is a Greek word in the New Testament that is often translated “repentance” but it is more actually described as the transformation of body, mind and soul, one that will be manifest in a growing desire to move toward a more just society that is more consistent with God’s vision of the Kingdom of God.

Second, we must learn to…

1. appreciate the **differences** that mark human existence. Before people can even hope to create relationships, and bonds of solidarity that truly reflect justice, they must learn how to understand the differences that separate them. Not only are differences real, they are essential aspects of identity that shape our consciousness in different ways. People of color, women, people with disabilities, the LGBTQ+ community, people living in poverty, or with chronic illness all have unique perspectives to offer, perspectives that help in understanding the world and its problems in new and different ways. Honoring difference requires learning how to understand and respect the lives of our global neighbors, a task that entails a good deal of listening.

Third, we must be…

1. willing to be held to **account** by oppressed people. Solidarity has to be more than a sympathetic gesture in support of a cause or the pain and suffering of others. True solidarity must move beyond wearing a wristband or buying a T-Shirt, it must genuinely reflect accountability and concrete engagement. It represents a bond between people that calls for loyalty, compassion and companionship, a bond rooted in the *agape* love of Christ and the Christian call to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31).

And finally, we must find ways to…

1. **participate** in changing the systems that create injustice. Practicing solidarity is all about action. It requires individuals, families, communities and churches to discern together how to reshape their own lifestyles and consumer habits in ways that reflect a transformed body, mind, and soul. A transformation that leads us to act more sustainably and just in our daily lives, following Christ’s lead in becoming more fully human, reflecting the Divine through our even our human weaknesses in more humane ways.

Congratulations, you folk who have taken the first step in establishing the bond of solidarity with those who experience hunger in our country and in countries around the world. This a Christ-like action. And it is my prayer that it will lead you and this church deeper into the practice of solidarity with those who suffer, so that the Kingdom of God may come in fullness here on earth, as it is in heaven.

Amen.