**Practicing Solidarity – Philippians 2:1-11**

Bless the Donated Items:

As we bless these items gathered, that will be donated to Bellewood and Brooklawn, the UCC affiliated residential youth home and family services here in Louisville. These supplies will be used to stock a cottage occupied by youth accessing care there.

Pray:

The Bellewood and Broolawn vision is to heal the hearts and minds of vulnerable youth and their families, to restore their hope, instill confidence, further their education and encourage spirituality and faith through a comprehensive program of loving care. May we, through this donation, and our continuing support of this much needed organization share in this mission and see the healing work of the kin-dom carried out in the lives of the vulnerable youth and families.

Amen.

Each month here at St Andrew UCC we invite you to participate in a variety of benevolence offerings. Some, like this month’s is a collection of items, and at other times it’s a monetary offering. These offerings, along with all the other opportunities for service whether it’s cooking meals at the Ronald McDonald House, packing medical supplies and equipment at SOS, collecting, delivering and distributing food for St Matthews Area Ministries, to restocking our Little Food Pantry out by the road, visiting the homebound, giving someone a phone call or writing a note…**what you are doing and continue to do is so important…and it’s actually a very Christ-like thing to do.**

The key word for this morning is **solidarity**, because as you provide for those who do not have enough food, medical supplies or shelter you also learn something about those who experiences the effects of poverty her in Louisville and elsewhere across this country and in the world. Your generosity is an act of justice, a way making love visible in the world, and you are establishing a bond based on empathy and compassion for those who suffer. This is the heart of the Christian message, the gospel…truly Good News. 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. That is liberation, or in another word, salvation.

*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 this morning, 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.

This hymn speaks not of sacrifice and suffering, but of God’s willingness to give up privilege to create solidarity. For those with privilege to be of the same mind that was in Christ Jesus (v. 5), they must choose not to exploit that advantage, but to empty themselves of it and collectively create hope and transformation through solidarity with one another.

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”.*

The hymn sings that Jesus did not think divinity was something to be “exploited” (harpagmos, v. 6). The verb “exploit” calls up images of the powerful or devious taking advantage of the weak or naïve, or thoughts of someone taking advantage of a chance opportunity to get a head start over potential rivals. To exploit, one has to have an advantage, an edge, something that offers this head start, a superior position, some supremacy that creates an unfair playing field.

Jesus, however, did not think divinity was a privilege to be exploited. So, he gave up his privilege and in leaving his position of advantage, he gains a solidarity with humanity. He gave up his privilege to be equal with us. He gave up his privilege to be one with us. He gave up his privilege so we could be siblings with him at the same table, equals enjoying one another’s company, God with us, instead of God over us. In the hymn, giving up privilege is sharing what belongs to all. An early Church saying reveals as much: Jesus became like us so we might become like Christ – the incarnation is the ultimate act of solidarity. An 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.

And we are the inheritors of this legacy, or this Way or being in the world. 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, every time we volunteer, gather items, or collect funds, every time we educate ourselves about topics that impact the most vulnerable and every time we show up to support and love those who are isolated and routinely targeted. Every time, we seek to *“adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus,”* though we rarely do it perfectly, we are seeking to surrender our privilege and demonstrate solidarity with others.

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.

Dear friends, may we never tire of learning and practicing the Way of Jesus, a way of humility and love, a way that will challenge us to surrender our privilege every day. These are Christ-like actions. And it is my prayer that as we grow in ministry together that we would be led deeper into the sacred practice of solidarity with those who suffer, so that the Kin-dom of God may come in fullness here on earth, as it is in heaven.

Amen.