*The LCA provides this sermon edited for lay-reading, with thanks to the original author.*

Sermon for Year A Proper 21

# The Text: Philippians 2:1-13

In the Epistle reading, from Philippians, we’re given some direction regarding how we should live, and how we should relate to others.

The Holy Spirit, through St Paul, tells us we’re to do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit—nothing out of pride and arrogance—but in humility we’re to consider others better than ourselves. Each of us should look not only to our own interests, but also to the interests of others. Our attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus!

When I ponder these words I feel a bit embarrassed—even a sense of shame—because I know that I fall far short! And I know that I’m not alone!

Isn’t selfishness actually behind much of what we do? Don’t we quite often put our own interests first and consider ourselves better than others? Is the example set by Jesus—who made himself nothing and took the very nature of a servant, and the attitude of Jesus, what we actually consistently live out? I know that when I asked myself those questions this last week the answers that I had to give in my heart were answers that made me uncomfortable, embarrassed and yes, even ashamed!

Looking at Jesus and the example of his life and attitude can be a confronting thing for us. It can confront us with how much we’ve fallen short, it can confront us with our sin, it can confront us with a sense of shame. We look at Jesus and see that he had no selfish ambition! He was humble and considered the interests of others as he carried his cross to be crucified!

A sense of shame is surely something we’ve all experienced—just think of the things you’ve done, or that have been done to you, that you wouldn’t want your friends, let alone the wider public to know. But let’s also consider for a few moments the shame that Jesus experienced as he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!!

Do you know why the Roman's killed people on a cross? One word—shame! The cross was a special form of execution for the worst of criminals.

The Romans were very efficient at killing people. For regular criminals, it was judgement, and out the back door, stabbed with a sword, put away!

But those who challenged Roman authority would be made to be a lesson for others! Stripped, abused, paraded through the streets, hung on a cross to die not just a slow death, but a slow public death, with no dignity at all. Crucifixion was the ultimate shame! Not even the corpse was given any respect because in most cases it was left to rot and be picked at by birds and dogs!

It’s interesting that we Christians choose a cross as a sign of whose we are. The cross is really a picture of shame!

Jesus who once hung there was, and still is, no stranger to shame!

He wasn’t born into a prominent family!

Jesus was born to Mary who’d gotten pregnant before her marriage to Joseph.

Can you imagine what the neighbours said about Mary!

Then there’s where Jesus was from, *"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?"* Nathanael exclaimed!

And then there was Jesus’ vocation - a simple carpenter!

Jesus ate with sinners, with prostitutes, and other so-called rotten people. And the religious authorities said, "How can you eat with those people!” Shame!

Did you know that at one point some in Jesus’ own family thought He was mentally ill – crazy–more shame!

In Jesus’ preaching, he said God's love was even for people of other nationalities. His community wanted to kill him for saying such a shameful thing! Jesus was no stranger to shame! He could handle shame! And he can handle ours!!

That’s one of the great things about being a Christian! Christ took our sin upon himself to pay for it and take it away. He also took our shame on Himself! The shame caused by the things we’ve done. The shame caused by the things done to us! Jesus can handle that, Jesus can deal with that!

And with no shame, we’re set free to live! With no shame we’re free to say – I’m a Christian!

We often think the most common commandment of Jesus is to love, but I don’t think it is. I think the most common command is actually: *“Fear not! Do not be afraid!”* This is one of the reasons we gather publicly in Christ’s presence like we have this morning! We aren’t afraid, we aren’t ashamed, to confess what we believe.

We’re also not afraid to confess that we fall short, to admit that our lives don’t measure up to God’s perfect standard to the example that Christ has set. That we’ve shamed ourselves, and been shamed. *“Fear not, don’t be afraid!”* Christ is so much more than your example—he’s most importantly your Saviour and he can handle your shame! He removes it!!!

Here today, and every day, as Christians we identify with Christ, who hung in shame on a cross. Here today we gather to confess our faith in him and confess our sin—placing our shame in God’s more than capable hands! And we’re set free by this truth: the truth that even though the world may call us 'useless' or 'crazy' or 'abused' or 'addicted' or 'unemployed' or 'a no-body' a 'failure"

God who is perfect in love, and perfect in power, looks at us and ***doesn’t*** say, ‘I’m ashamed of you!’ He looks at us and says, ‘you’re clean, your whole, your loved, you’re special. You are my child. I am at work in you and through you. You’re worthy to bear my name—*“The name above all names"*. Amen.