

2:1 If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy,

2:2 make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

2:3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.

2:4 Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

2:5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

2:6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,

2:7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form,

2:8 he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death-- even death on a cross.

2:9 Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,

2:10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

2:11 and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

2:12 Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;

2:13 for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

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Trinity Episcopal Church, Bend Oregon
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Philippians 2:1-13

I want to explore a verse or two in Paul's letter to the Philippians we heard today.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus...emptied himself... being born in human likeness and being found in human form.

I want to play with the idea of self emptying. What that might mean for us. I don't think emptying yourself means emptying yourself of yourself. I don't think this is really a negation. Rather I think self emptying suggests to make room.

Make room for what is yet to come. Which we know not of. Make room for the unexpected. Keep space open for what we cannot plan or anticipate. Keep space open for what eye has not seen nor hear heard. Which might sound like keeping space open for nothing. But I say it is keeping space open for everything. Which might sound a little dangerous.

Consider self emptying a practice of hospitality. Welcoming the other. Welcoming the new. Risking certainties for the otherwise. Risking welcoming the Stranger. Jesus was all about hospitality. And we know such hospitality was not about etiquette. The way he understood hospitality violated the status quo. Challenged what was taken for granted. He made a place when there was no place. It changed the world.

Paul suggests that Jesus emptied himself of divinity. And took on human form. I am not going to explore what divinity might mean. Or what Paul might have meant. I will emphasize, along with Paul, that Jesus was fully human."Born in human likeness and found in human

form,” as Paul puts it. Jesus was one of us. He is what human possibility is about. So we can be “of the same mind.”

Again I suggest we think about self emptying as making room. In our lives, in our hearts, in our minds, for the More. For that which is to come. Which is in the everyday.

To provide an image for self emptying I want to share one of my favorite poems of late. The poem describes a skylight, an opening, in a ceiling of seasoned tongue and groove. Consider the skylight an image for self emptying. Granted a skylight lets things in. But that is my point. And consider the seasoned tongue and groove of the ceiling an image for what is familiar, certain, secure, tight, decided, closed. The absence of a skylight.

Are you with me? Again this is my playing with the idea of self emptying. And what it might mean for us.

The poem is The Skylight. The poet Seamus Heaney.

You were the one for skylights. I opposed
Cutting into the seasoned tongue-and-groove
Of pitch pine. I liked it low and closed,
Its claustrophobic, nest-up-in-the-roof
Effect. I liked the snuff-dry feeling,
The perfect, trunk-lid fit of the old ceiling.
Under there, it was all hutch and hatch.
The blue slates kept the heat like midnight thatch.
But when the slates came off, extravagant
Sky entered and held surprise wide open.
For days I felt like an inhabitant
Of that house where the man sick of the palsy
Was lowered through the roof, had his sins forgiven,
Was healed, took up his bed and walked away.

The skylight allowed for extravagant sky. And held surprise wide-open. I love that. The skylight opened a space. Made room for what I suggest is the unknown, the new, the not yet thought of.

But many of us are uncomfortable with surprise. We are wary of the unexpected. We are primed to fear the unexpected as though it will be worse than what we already know. We are wary of letting something in not of our making. It might be too risky.

We prefer the tested and tried, the closed and sheltered, the warmed and safe feeling of seasoned tongue and groove.

I mean I do. My home for instance is an example of the warmth and comfort of “seasoned tongue and groove.” I love the familiarity and security my home provides. Furniture and rugs from childhood. From the time before “the fall”, before the end of my innocence. My walls have paintings that bring the outside in. My morning chair is molded perfectly for me and my dog. Memorabilia reminds me of who I was. And who was with me. My home is time out of time in a way. A settled place. Amidst this rough and tumbling world. I love being in my home. Sheltered. I have filled it with things of comfort. It is refuge. From uncertainties.

Like Seamus Heaney said, I liked it low and closed.

So when I have thought of self emptying, I have tended to think about my comforts and familiarities. Afraid that to self empty meant I had to dislodge them. I didn't want to. I don't want to. And then I wondered about my thoughts and biases and opinions and judgements which I have spent a life time honing. They all fit together now. Kept tightly in my trunk-lid mind. If self emptying was about emptying out my thoughts and my ego, that would be too disruptive. Even destabilizing.

But now I suggest self emptying is simply allowing space for something else to happen. As simple and as difficult as that. Space for something else to influence. Or gift. Which by design most of us don't have room for. To self empty would allow for another idea or angle of vision. To self empty would make room for another person's thoughts and feelings, persuasions and conclusions. It would allow another view. Such hospitality might sound like more trouble than it's worth. But to simply allow space...so something else might happen. That could be disturbing. It could also be healing. Allowing space could mend. Could

make better. Could make sound. Could repair. It could also cause chaos.

So, what do you think? What do you make of the image of The Skylight and seasoned tongue and groove? Might you have preference for what is closed. And settled. Not imagining anything else. Actually, not knowing how to imagine anything else. Maybe you are risk averse. Well, better leave things alone then. Unsaid. I understand.

So, Why make room for the other. Why make room for what we don't already know. Why make room for what we don't know is coming. And for all we know will never come. Why do I think this is a good practice, an essential practice? Self emptying is not a reprimand. As if the call to self empty is accompanied by a wagging finger. I see Self emptying as an act of hope. It is indeed an act of humility. But it is an act of hope. It is an act of trust. I say it is an act of love. Self emptying, to allow space for possibility. That is an act of love.

But I can get so preoccupied with comforts or discomforts and so attached and befuddled to my thoughts about this and that, including the world, that I forget about love. It is uncomfortable for me to realize that when I get preoccupied with wondering and worrying I kinda forget that love is a thing. A real thing. That love is our life blood. What's love got to do with self emptying? Everything.

Self emptying is openness to possibility. I think love is too.

And with love, with possibilities, there is hope that the future will be better. Which to some may sound like folly. The world is in peril. We are in peril. Many of us take refuge under our seasoned tongue and groove and just hope we get out of here before it gets worse. That's not the kind of hope I am talking about. Many have given up on a future that can be better. I understand that too. But we must not give up. We must make room for what is to come with Hope. That is our promise for a better future. That is our commitment to life.

In other words we are to love this world. God so loves this world. Jesus so loves this world. We are to so love this world. That is our call. We

must make room for love. And the unexpected. And the unknown. And the to come. It is all of a piece.

We are to so love this world. Knowing that Love is not transaction. It does not guarantee. Love is always a risk. And we do not know from where it comes or where it goes. It is like the Spirit in that way. But love changes everything. We know that much don't we?

We are to Love this world. Against all odds. That is our greatness.

Whatever your capability, whatever state you are in, love this world. Love this life. Love your life. It is gift. And let it hold surprise wide open. Come what may. Do not be afraid. I know I am asking a lot.

Even if "the world will flame out, like shining from shook foil," writes poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, "it is charged with the grandeur of God." We know this. We must not forget this. Let us remind each other of this. The world is charged with the grandeur of God. How can we not love it.

"Nature is never spent," continues Hopkins. "There lives the dearest freshness deep down things...the world broods with warm breast and with ah! Bright wings."

And there is something never spent deep down in us as well. In our humanness. In our human form. As it was in Jesus.

Self empty. Make room. For ah! Bright wings.

Our current troubles are not the inevitable. It does not have to be this way. We must not let the troubles of today threaten our hopes. Or make a mockery of love.

We are to trust that from deep down something will arise and the greatest of these is Love.

The imperative of the skylight, the imperative of self emptying is

to make room. For what eye has not seen nor ear heard. But we will feel it in our own bodies. We will know it.

“The skylight cracked open the low and closed trunk-lid fit of the old ceiling” says the poem.

"There is a crack in everything,' sings Leonard Cohen. “That’s how the light gets in.” And I say that’s how love gets in. There is a crack in everything. And self emptying is a crack. Let self emptying be our everything.

Seamus Heaney said that after the skylight he felt like the man lowered through the roof who was sick with palsy and now was healed. Able to take up his bed. And walk.

Skylight is healing. It can heal us of our fear and trembling and paralysis and a sickness that wounds our hope. Skylight allows The More to come in. And there is more to come.

Make room for skylight in your seasoned tongue and groove. Be hospitable. In the way Jesus was hospitable. Let the same mind be in you. Welcome the unexpected. The unknown. The new. The Other. The Stranger. Your self. Welcome love. From the depths, from beyond, from what is to come, something will arise. We will see its bright wings glimmer. And take up our mat. And walk. Under an extravagant sky.