

Sunday 27th September 2026: Benefice Holy Communion
Oswaldkirk

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself.”

The passage in today's Epistle from Philippians begins with divine self-emptying: Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not use equality with God for his own advantage, but humbled himself for us. We often reflect on this mystery at Christmas, when we celebrate the Word becoming flesh, and during Holy Week we see where that humility leads. The Son of God does not merely share our humanity; he walks the road of service, suffering and the cross. The saving message of Christianity is that there no greater gift than this. Among all the sacrifices made throughout human history, none can compare with God's own Son becoming one of us and giving himself for us.

Because Jesus became one of us, we can see what the life of God looks like in human form. Yet his self-emptying was not the abandonment of divinity. Rather, he refused to grasp at status or privilege and took the form of a slave. He became not only human like us, but a servant to us, because the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.

We will be reminded of this great gift again this on Maundy Thursday, when we hear in our gospel the story of Jesus washing his disciples' feet. The act of a servant, done by God's Son to show us what it means to love, to truly love. Jesus humbled himself, serving us, even stooping to wash our feet. But even then, Jesus was not finished. He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross. The great sacrifice that we remember today, as we remembered a couple of weeks ago on Holy Cross Sunday at Gilling's patronal service.

Again today, we are reminded that not only did he become human, emptying himself of his divinity, but he allowed other humans to ridicule him, to torture him, and to kill him in the most shameful way possible. All for us. No greater love has been shown us, truly, nor could there be greater love ever shown, than what Jesus did for us. From divinity to humanity, from being served to serving, and from life to death. All for us. Now, he is finished. It is finished, as Jesus would say on the cross. But God was not finished, nor is this beautiful passage finished. Not at all. For after doing all of this for us, God does something for Jesus, highly exalting him, and giving him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. God exalted Jesus. Raising him to life, to eternal glory. No longer humbled, but exalted. No longer dead, but alive. No longer merely in human likeness, but in heavenly glory. The lamb who died for the sins of the world, now hailed as our victor and our king, our Lord and our God.

St Paul does not tell the Philippians—and us—these wonderful things merely so that we may admire what God has done in Jesus. He calls us to have the same mind as Christ, *to be the same as Him*. This is what being His disciple means; to be like Him, His apprentice, His follower. We too are invited to empty ourselves of pride, the need to be noticed and the desire always to have our own way. We are too called to empty ourselves and to serve God and one another in ordinary, and sometimes costly acts: listening patiently, forgiving freely, noticing those who are overlooked and doing good without seeking praise. This is the paradox of the Christian life: true greatness is found in humility, and exaltation comes through servanthood. In a world that rewards self-promotion and ambition, Jesus shows us a radically

different path—the way of surrender, generous love and faithful service. Do you want that more than anything else? If you do, then you are on your way to emptying yourself too.

So, as we enter another week, let us follow Jesus with open eyes and willing hearts. Let us kneel with him beside the basin to wash feet, remain with him at the cross and wait in hope beside the tomb. Then let us rise to serve, carrying his mind into our homes, our church and our community. For the one who emptied himself has been exalted; the one who was crucified is Lord; and the love that appeared defeated has become the hope of the world. May every knee bow, every tongue confess, and every life reveal that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Thanks be to God. Amen.