SERMON based on Philippians chapter 2 by Tom Farrell.

Revision! The Church (fellowship) in Philippi was young , born against all the odds. A slave girl believes the message about Jesus, the messengers, (Paul and Silas) are flogged and in prison with their feet in the stocks and singing hymns at midnight, the earth moves, the prison doors come off their hinges, and the jailor is on his knees asking how to be saved - an evangelists' dream situation! Vindication for Paul and Silas, confusion among the enemy... and VICTORY for the great cause. EUPHORIA! Who wouldn't want to be on the PCC in Philippi? The church was exciting and upwardly mobile, but in danger of being divided.

 v3 St Paul writes 'Do nothing out of selfish ambition'. There were individuals who were out to promote, not the great cause, but themselves. It happens In politics, as we've all been reminded recently. It only takes someone with a personal agenda... It happens in every institution, every walk of life. It can even happen in a church,and it was happening in Philippi! Selfish ambition!

 There was second danger. v3 NIV 'Do nothing out of vain conceit! W.Barclay - 'desire for empty glory'. It's a good thing gone wrong. Psychologists tell us that to be recognised as an individual of worth is a fundamental human need. But it can get out of hand, the desire to make an impression, to be noticed, to be SOMEBODY, a celebrity! The devil knows the POWER of vain conceit, self display! He even tried it out on the Son of God. He was there at the baptism, heard the words. 'This is my Son in whom I am well pleased' and took note. So he's divine! But how human is he? Is he like all the rest? Has he got a weakness... an Achilles heel? So He takes Jesus to a high place on the temple roof. Invites him to step off, 'the angels will keep you safe! Make a big impression They'll follow you to the end of the earth. No need to get crucified! and Jesus sent him packing.

 It's a good time to remind ourselves that Christians are called to self - obliteration, not self-display. And if that sounds OTT. It was Jesus who said "if anyone wants to come with me, let him say No to self and take up his cross. It's a tall order. Charles Wesley the great Methodist wrote in his hymn, More and more THYSELF display. Let the beauty of JESUS be seen in me... we sang as young people

Ambition, prestige, status... Do you see the common denominator? It's SELF!! or its alter ego... PRIDE. No one is immune! It can happen to the best. St Augustine said 'It was pride that changed angels into devils.' Martin Luther, the great champion of Biblical Christianity, in the days when the Popes were a by-word for worldliness, arrogance, extravagance, and lust of power, and were gunning for him, saId 'I am more afraid of my own heart than all the popes in Christendom. I have within me the great Pope - SELF!'

Selfish ambition, vain conceit... These were dangers the Philippian Christians had to face and deal with. But, Paul tgells them , you have everything going for you. Look at verse s 1 and 2

 VERSES 1 & 2 First - 'you have encouragement from being IN CHRIST - united with Christ.. One with Him makes them one with another. Second... you have the reassurance of His love. Not just a 'natural' reaction of the heart, as ordinary, human love is. This is supernatural love, the love of God which gives you the power to love one another, especially people you find difficult to like and get on with; to love them, get closer to them, work with them , for the sake of the Gospel. Third... You have fellowship with the Holy Spirit. It's He who 'shed abroad' the love of God in our hearts (Romans 5. verse 5 - easy to remember.) It's there! Let it out!

SO verse 3 Now Paul makes an amazing request, perhaps demand. 'In humility .. let each consider others better than yourself. Better in WHAT WAY? Well, for a start, Holier. More like Jesus... For example... JOAN my fellow minister, this morning. I am to 'Consider' Joan better than myself! that means to believe that she's better than me. Oh, I'm a better RUNNER, (I think!) but Joan's better at domestic science and horticulture and things. It doesn't mean that. It means I need to take it for granted that she is holier than me, because I need her to inspire me.

And vice versa. Joan needs to consider me holier than her... and pray for me that I'm working on it, with the Holy Spirit's help'. And knowing THAT makes me want to be holier. Not to compete or keep up with her... 'cos I can't possibly know how far behind I am or how far ahead she is. Probably just as well! We can both leave that to God and hope we're making progress!

 And it applies to us all. Not just an elite. 'Let EACH consider others holier than oneself. That means taking it for granted that ALL my fellow christians are holier than me! It's one way of measuring our love for one another!

 Does it sound utopian, wishful thinking? No! It's a perfect antidote to VAIN CONCEIT and a sure way to 'keep the unity of the Spirit.'

Which brings us to Paul's magnificent winding up. Paul in his elem ent, on his favourite topic. JESUS - THE PERFECT ROLE MODEL! 'Let this mind (set), this attitude, be in you which was ALSO IN CHRIST JESUS... Think like Jesus.

v 6 'being In very nature God. ' The AV says 'In the form of God'. Some have taken this to mean He was a DIVINE LOOK-ALIKE. Paul wants to clear that up! He says Jesus didn't SNATCH AT equality with God. He didn't need to! He ALREADY HAD IT! From the word go. John 1v 1,2 Colossians, 1 v 15-18, 19. Hebrews 1 v 2,3 and others.

NOW SEE HOW HIS DIVINE NATURE TOOK HIM ON A DOWNWARDLY MOBILE journey.

v7 'made himself nothing'. Downward STEP ONE, with due respect to the translators, it doesn't make sense. Nothing is nothing! A nothing can't humble itself, can't serve, can't be obedient, can't suffer ...can't die. 'he made himself nothing' MAY SOUND DRAMATIC! but it misses the point. The good old AV is much nearer... He made Himself of no reputation A NOBODY! A nobody can be obedient, can serve , and suffer, a NOBODY can give his life a ransom for many, a NOBODY can die.

The GREEK word, means He 'EMPTIED' himself. JBPhillips - stripped Himself of every advantage. Noel Richards, in his beautiful song put it PERFECTLY - You laid aside your majesty,... gave up everything...

v7B '....taking the very nature of a SERVANT - STEP NUMBER 2 Note similarity of wording. 'v6 being in VERY nature God.... taking the VERY nature of a serva nt.. the Greek word is DOULOS ... SLAVE. A slave had no STATUS, NO RIGHTS, NO PRIVILEGES, a NOBODY!

He said 'Foxes have dens, but the Son of Man has nowhere to stay.' No place to call his own. A first century dosser! Samuel Crossman in his well known hymn.. 'In life no house , no home my Lord might have In death NO FRIENDLY tomb but what a stranger gave. What may I say? Heaven was his home, but mine the TOMB in which He lay.

v8 'Being found in appearance as a man, i.e. OUT IN THE OPEN, FULLY HUMAN!... STEP THREE 'HE HUMBLED HIMSELF . Not just humble acts, looking for feet to wash. etc! HIS WHOLE LIFE WAS an acvt of obedience and self-sacrifice. He didn't have HUMILIATION forced on him. He Humbled HMSELF.

 'and became OBEDIENT STEP FOUR A slave's role is to OBEY, and Jesus says 'Not my will!' - not resignation but obedience. BUT WHOSE WILL WAS HE OBEYING? Isaiah the prophet, writing 700 years BC gave us the answer and it's not for the squeamish! Writing about the MYSTERIOUS, UNNAMED, person, known as the Suffering Servant of the Lord also known and LOVED by billions down the years as Jesus Christ. He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our sins, He was led as a lamb to the a slaughter, despised, ignored and rejected, then the staggering truth...verse 9...

 Though He had done no violence, neither was there any deceit in his mouth, YET IT WAS THE LORD's WILL TO CRUSH HIM! We'll be thinking about it in a few minutes...

Noel Richards again, the end... - You laid aside your majesty, gave up everything for me.

Let's pray.

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