



The Westminster Pulpit

Sermons Preached at Westminster Presbyterian Church
3900 West End Avenue Nashville, Tennessee 37205-1899

“The Lord Among Us” **Sermon on Philippians 2:1-13**

Stephanie Boaz

September 27, 2026
Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

“Is the Lord Among us?” That is what it says at the end of our first lesson from Exodus. It was the question on the minds and hearts of the Israelites who had been recently freed from generations under the thumb of Pharaoh in Egypt. They were free from the forced hard labor. They were freed from being constantly controlled by a leader who feared them. Their growing numbers and their amazing tendency to hold one another up in community was a threat to Pharaoh. The people spurred one another on and practiced their faith in God, no matter what Pharaoh threw at them. And Pharaoh threw everything at them.

I can picture the celebration that must have taken place on the far side of the sea! The people hugging and exclaiming, “Did you see that? Who would have thought that we could just walk between walls of water towered up on either side of us? The ground was so dry. We aren’t even wet!”

Then their exclaiming turned to worship. Miriam was singing and dancing, and the music spread through the people. Instruments were pulled from their bundles. The music rose up from their hearts—a sweet smelling-sacrifice of joy and gratitude wafting toward the heart of God.

The people had packed well—as they had been instructed. They had packed food and wine and water—and, if you remember, the neighbors’ gold. They had more than they needed, certainly. They did. And, they could only carry so much.

So, it wasn’t long before their nourishment ran out. Yet, they were still in the wilderness—in the desert. Nobody knew the way—except to follow Moses. The people got restless, nervous. They were even complaining that God should have left them in Egypt or at least killed them there instead of in the desert. Whether it was that they were thirsty—as they had been several chapters before this. Or they were hungry or feared they were lost—each time, God was faithful in providing. And there was thanksgiving and relief among the people. Until the next time something was hard to find or scary for them.

We are familiar with this pattern. It is truly human. When we are fine--we are fine. We have what we need. But, as soon as we are without OR we are afraid of losing what we have or need—the questions do come. Like, “Is the Lord among us.”

It is a common human experience. Jesus came into our human experience—he came to be among us.

Philippians 2:1-13.

If, then, there is any comfort in Christ, any consolation from love, any partnership in the Spirit, any tender affection and sympathy, ² make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others. ⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

⁶ who, though he existed in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be grasped,

⁷ but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
assuming human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a human,

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

⁹ Therefore God exalted him even more highly
and gave him the name
that is above every other name,

¹⁰ so that at the name given to Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

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

¹² Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence but much more now in my absence, work on your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Humility. I think it is fair to say that, culturally, this is not one of our favorite words. We can appreciate those who are humble. But, in our culture we seem to be more concerned with being first and most and best. Why do I need to be humble? There are others who need to humble themselves more than I do. Humility? Weakness is more like it. There are so many waiting to take advantage. No one wants to be the sucker who lets others make a way for themselves at their own expense. It can feel like that these days. We can feel like that these days.

But Paul reminds the Philippians—reminds us—that Jesus “emptied himself. He “humbled himself” to come among us. His humility went all the way to death on the Cross.

This week, I found a story called, Mountain Goat Grace.

It is a story about some mountain goats that lived near the top of a rocky mountain. Around one end of the mountain was a narrow ledge. It was not even a foot wide. Fortunately, mountain goats can navigate narrow ledges. One goat started to walk around the ledge from one side of the mountain, and another goat started to walk around from the other side. They met each other halfway, face to face. Because the ledge was so narrow, they couldn't get past each other. They just stood there, staring at each other, nose to nose.

What were they going to do?

But then one goat knelt down—first his front legs, and then the back—so that the other goat *could go over top of him and continue on his way!* After he had done this, the goat that had knelt down got up and continued on his way as well.

The message was: Even though it's not a very popular idea, following Jesus involves *humility*.

This is a sweet story. I began to wonder if Mountain Goats really handle themselves this way. So, I typed into Google, "Mountain Goat behavior when meeting on a narrow path."

And you know what I found? Nothing—not a thing to suggest that this is common Mountain Goat etiquette or behavior.

What's more? This sweet story is actually a rewriting of one of Aesop's fables.

The fable tells about two Mountain Goats who met on either side of a branch that had fallen across the gap between two mountain trails on either side of a deep divide. Both goats stood at the branch-bridge intending to cross to the other side. Now, that branch was only large enough for one goat. Maybe the goats knew this or maybe they didn't. Whatever the case, both goats stepped on the branch from their respective sides and began to cross—inevitably, so it seems, they met in the middle. They could not walk past each other. One of them had to back up to let the other through if they were going to pass safely. But, neither budged. And, in their unyielding stalemate, they both ended up plunging into the chasm below. (Thanks Aesop.) The moral was, "It is better to yield than to come to misfortune through stubbornness."

Now those are two very different stories. I don't know if the sweet one was written by AI trying to tug at our heart strings—mission accomplished. Or if the story was simply re-imagined by someone who wanted a lovely sermon illustration.

But, I felt duped. I know enough to not trust just anything old thing I read. Everything needs to be verified these days. And, once I had read both stories—well the fable was, sadly, the one that felt more realistic. At least it feels more like our human experience.

Which brings us back to the significance of Paul's letter to the Philippians. He wanted to remind them of the Humility of Christ that closed the gap between God and God's people.

Paul loved the church in Philippi. They were a precious communion of people he had not planned to meet. Rather, on the way to someplace else, God guided Paul to the Philippians. In Philippi, he met a diversity of people who came to believe in Jesus.

Acts chapter 16 gives an account of the first people in Philippi to believe what Paul was preaching about Jesus.

There was Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth—She was a successful businesswoman who made a living for her entire family. Once she believed, she brought her whole household to be baptized.

A young slave girl with a fortune-telling spirit—she was used by her masters to make money off the fortunes the young girl told for paying patrons. She had followed Paul and is people around, all day, shouting that they were servants of the most high God who came to proclaim salvation. She did this all day and very loudly. Out of annoyance, Paul finally cast out the Spirit in Jesus' name. That got Paul sent to jail—her masters felt robbed by him—but the young girl had heard the message. She had been set free and was changed forever.

Then, there is the jailer who thought he lost all of his prisoners. Paul, and Silas had also been jailed with him, had been praying and praising God. They sang with gusto while the other prisoners listened. Then there was an earthquake that broke the jail wide open. The jailer thought, for certain, that the prisoners had all escaped and he would face terrible consequences—maybe even death. But none of them had moved. The jailer was so overwhelmed by all the prisoners staying put, that it led him to believe what Paul and Silas had been proclaiming. So, he and his household were baptized.

A business woman, a slave girl, a jailer—even the other prisoners—all heard the message Paul brought. This is the story Acts tells us about the very beginning of the church in Philippi.

That fellowship grew. And, in its growing and being, conflict had arisen. Of course, with any group of people, different or similar—there will be disagreements. Sometimes those disagreements can get heated. And, inevitably, people start to take sides or just steer clear of the whole thing. Either way, it becomes a problem by creating divisions. It is a problem, especially for a people who have been called together for the same purpose.

Which is why Paul writes them a letter reminding them of their purpose and of the One who has called them together.

The message Paul shares—points the people right back to Jesus. Paul reminds them of the one who is worthy of their praise. The one to whom it is always safe to bow. And, Paul reminds them through worship.

You see, verses 5-11 in chapter 2 of Philippians, is often referred to as “The Christ Hymn.” It seems that these words were a song that followers of Christ sang together when they gathered for worship.

When reading the letter—presumably out loud to the whole fellowship—the people's hearts would have begun to turn, so quickly, to worship. The words were familiar. The words pointed to Christ. And those words had brought them together so many times before.

So, in addressing the division between them, Paul chose to call them to worship.

And then he urged them to “Put on the Mind of Christ.”

Now, let's be clear. He was not calling the people to agree with each other about everything. I think we all know from our personal experience that this is not easy for people. I am not even sure it is possible. Of course, all things are possible for God. But, all people

agreeing with each other, I am not so sure. So, Paul wasn't calling them to agree about everything. Rather, Paul was calling the people to put on the mind of Christ—see things from Christ's perspective. Remember what you know about Jesus—how he loved, how he taught, how he sacrificed, and how he changed the world forever by closing the gap between God and God's people. And, then worship. Paul knew, worship is about focusing on and Praising God. Worship would help turn the people's attention to Christ.

Paul knew this was not easy for the Philippians. It is not easy for any of us. But, when we look to Christ, it becomes possible to see things his way more often. It can change the way we see ourselves, and treat each other and in so doing change the way we are in our day to day lives.

I came across another story this week. This story is also from a preacher, so verified it to make sure that it all seems to be based on truth.

This pastor was attending a conference at a church, and leading into that church there was a long line of cars who were filling up the huge parking lot. As he parked, he noticed the word Love on a light post in that section. As he walked into the building he crossed another section of the parking lot, and he saw the word Faithfulness high up on another light pole. The next day he pulled into a different lot at the same church and saw Patience on another sign. And then he realized that these were like the numbers or letters in a mall parking lot or in a hospital garage. You may not spend that much time at hospitals, but I do. And my phone's camera is full of pictures of a concrete post with A1 or E6 because the picture helps me remember where I parked. And that is what these words—Love, Faithfulness and patience were doing. People could take a picture of these words to help them find their cars.

Of course, there is no doubt these signs also served another purpose. After each session, some people were in a hurry to get home or onto whatever they had scheduled after the conference. And, in their hurry, they rushed by each other--sometimes even cutting others off to get out of the lot. As you can imagine, patience wore thin and tempers flared.

So, how appropriate were those signs looming large in the parking lot! It's amazing how quickly the love we have for our brothers and sisters in Christ can disappear in a parking lot! Not to mention when things are really hard or annoying.

The truth is that the testing of our faith may come through heavy burdens, but it's just as likely to occur in a checkout line, on the expressway, [in our churches] or in a parking lot.
—D. C. Egner

Friends, we need reminders to focus our attention in the right direction. We may not always get things right, but whenever we look to Christ together it changes how we are and continues to change who we are.

Because Jesus has changed us. He's been changing people since before the Church in Philippi.

This is a good time to call your attention to the art on the front of the bulletin. This little fella may look like Donovan to some of you, but that is purely accidental. This art caught my attention this week because I think there are times when we as Christians can feel like the work we are called to do is too hard, too big. This little guy is wondering, "Why do I have to change the world?" And the truth is, we don't. I don't. Christ has already changed the world.

We are simply called to live out that change. We are called to focus on Christ who is the true world changer. And, like Paul directs the Philippians—and directs us—we are called to focus our attention on the mind of Christ. That is what we are called to do.

And we do this by gathering in worship each week. This isn't just some place we come out of habit or because we feel like we have to. We don't come just because people expect us to come. This is a time and a space when we focus our hearts together on the mind of Christ. And, friends, we are not just invited to do this through worship. You can look at your bulletins and see the variety of ways that the staff have imagined to help us—even between Sundays--to focus on the mind of Christ.

And, when we do it together, it changes us all—not just the way we feel about each other and those around us. It also changes the way others see us. They can come to recognize that we are not just a place. We are not just a people. We are not alone. The Lord is among us.

That is our calling. We don't do it by ourselves. We do it with each other. And we do it with the Lord who has and is changing the world.

So, may God hold us faithful for all the days and years to come. AMEN.

©2026 Stephanie Boaz
All Rights Reserved.