

## **Philippians 2:1-11** *Ignorance & Power*

### Introduction

We are beginning our new sermon series looking at 6 different ways we can care for one another well through the way we talk and act towards each other. And these are called the 'Pastoral principles'.

The sermon topics we will be looking at are:

IGNORANCE

POWER

FEAR

PREJUDICE

speaking into **SILENCE**

& **HYPOCRISY**

These topics in and of themselves are brilliant for helping us address how we treat one another. But they are also key principles to bear in mind as we start our Living in Love and Faith Course at the end of September.

This morning I have the wonderful task of preaching on our first two topics, ignorance and power, particularly through the lens of our Bible verse this morning: Philippians 2:1-11, so let's start.

Looking at our passage in chapter 2 this morning: firstly we discover Pauls' heart for unity, which addresses Ignorance. And in the second half we find the Messiah poem, which discusses power.

So let's look at our first half Philippians 2:1-5.

### *Addressing Ignorance*

This first half of our passage calls the church to stand *firm* and *united* in their faith, whatever comes their way. And, Paul says, that they do this through having the mind of Christ. But what does that mean? To have the same mind as someone is to know their thoughts and to be in agreement with them; to be of one mind together. So, when it

comes to disagreements, Paul asks the church to be of one mind with Christ by considering how Christ would respond to a disagreement; ***humbly and looking to the interests of others***. The opposite is to hold onto our own ambitions and agendas and therefore to look to our own interest. The reality is when we do this we only see a tiny corner of the larger picture: we become focused on our own goals and miss what else God is trying to show us, we become ignorant of one-another.

Ignorance creates disagreement because instead of listening to one another we put up walls, and there's only two ways of living with the walls up, to hide and never communicate with the other person, or to yell and shout so they can hear you through all the brick. Ignorance lacks love and leads us to disunity. And let's not forget that it was ignorance of who Jesus was and what he had come to do which nailed him to the cross

Whereas *listening* breaks down the walls and allows each side to be heard. It's how Ignorance is dismantled and love and unity begin to grow.

Our marriage preparation course talks of each of us being a rhino or a hedgehog in different situations. Both have to stop and listen if it is to be fruitful.

It is only when we lay down our own ambition, our own agenda, that we can stop our own isolated ignorance and truly listen to one another. Becoming one mind in Christ together.

As we come to discuss what are important issues in our church life over the next few months, let's remember to pause, breathe, listen and put the other person first. Not because we should but because that is what Christ has done for us in becoming like us and this is what the second half of our passage talks about through what is known as 'the Messiah poem'.

It describes how, in Jesus, God 'emptied himself', choosing to humble himself, become like us, rather than exploiting the divine power that he could have used. And listening helps us to pay attention to the Power in relationships.

Power comes in many forms. It can be the obvious power held by a boss, a more subtle power held by the loud one in the group, or even a hidden power gained through the way someone acts towards you.

And many factors can lead to an imbalance of power in relationships - age, gender, ethnicity, education, economic status.... And in response to systemic power imbalances within society the recent #metoo campaign has challenged the power that rich men hold, and the anti racism rallies across America and the U.K are giving a voice to those who have been oppressed by the misuse of power, and Extinction Rebellion are taking action against the powerful destroying the planet.

Power dynamics exist in many of our relationships, and in order to listen well to one another we need to be especially aware when we hold the power. Because, when wielded well it can *empower* others, but when wielded unwisely it can contain, dominate and destroy others.

I have to acknowledge that many of us may have experiences of power imbalances, be that at work, at home, or because you're a woman, or maybe because you are more calm natured and are not often heard. But, whether we like it or not, most of us in this room hold a lot of power because of the colour of our skin, our wealth, and for some our gender. Here, in Goring Streatley and South Stoke we are some of the most well off people in the country and that makes us powerful.

The Church of England holds a lot of power, simply because it has a voice in local, nation and international governance. We have a voice in our local schools and when it comes to community and life events, where do people turn - the Church of England. We hold the power

simply because we are a state church. What we say and do with that power really matters.

One of the first essays I wrote for my masters last year was on racism in the Church of England. I have to say I spent most of my first term sobbing, and crying out to God. When you read about someone describing their experience of being black within the Church of England like still being a slave stuck on a ship; it's heart wrenching. Then, when I discovered that one of the curates in my year wasn't given a post because of the colour of his skin, it was no longer a story on a page, it was made very real.

At times The Church of England has chosen to wield the power it has to contain, dominate and destroy others. What message does this send to the world? What will the world think of Jesus? What we do with the power we are given matters!

Being powerful means it's our job to be like Christ and humble ourselves before those who have been marginalised and forgotten. We need to lay down our power and listen. Here's a story of what that can look like.

When I was considering ordination, I needed references from my church leaders, most if not all were against female leaders in the church. Because I needed their support, they held the power. But when I asked the conservative American pastor from my Church in Boston, he said that he was more than willing to write a reference for me, and he was capable of displaying my leadership qualities without it compromising his views.

Was this pastor neglecting his convictions for the sake of unity? No. He knew Jesus' humility and putting down his own agenda considered me above himself.

Let's remember this as we discuss contentious issues this month.

Where do you need to lay down your ignorance and your power to listen to your brother and sister?

As Paul says in Philippians 2, when we come to discuss difficult topics we are called to follow Christ by:

Laying down ourselves

And being obedient to God through our humility

This does not mean that we discard the truth of Christ for the sake of unity, not one bit. It means that we take on the truth of Christ through the way we care for our brothers and sisters. And I have no doubt that the church will begin to grow if we actually do this because as Jesus says in the gospel of John 'love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'

When Christ loved us, his life was the cost. When we follow Jesus it will cost us. But if we lose our life For the sake of Jesus, we gain eternal life in him.

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,

taking the form of a slave,

being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,

he humbled himself

and became obedient to the point of death—

even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him

and gave 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.

Amen.