

“Not All This Is Me”

Psalter Reading:

Psalm 8

New Testament Reading:

Hebrews 1:1-4. 2:5-12

A distinguished professor at the University of Chicago would, quite often, have his preschool granddaughter come visit him at his office. She loved to reach up and hold his hand and walk around campus with her grandfather. One day, he was carrying his granddaughter on his shoulders. They met a friend who had seen the little girl just the week before. The friend looked up at the little girl riding on her grandfather’s shoulders and, with a smile on his face and a twinkle in his eyes, said to her, “My goodness! Look at you! Look at how much you’ve grown since I saw you last week!”

The little girl replied, “Not all this is me.”

Of course, what she was saying was, “I’m not really this tall. I’m not really this big. I’m riding on someone else’s shoulders.” James Moore, in his book *Attitude Is Your Paintbrush*, says he likes this story because that sentiment powerfully represents how he feels every day. He says:

“I go through life riding on the shoulders of others. I go through life riding on the shoulders of my family, teachers, mentors, church, and staff. In addition, I go through life riding on the shoulders of the great Christians of history and the great people of faith who have gone before me. And even better than all this, I go through life carried on the shoulders of God and the Holy Spirit. You see, “Not all of this is me.””

Can’t we all relate? The truth is we all can find ourselves riding on the shoulders of others: family, friends, teachers, coaches, church, God. Whenever we do something that is good; whenever we strike a blow for justice; whenever we say a kind word or perform a compassionate deed; whenever we exhibit courage, confidence, or integrity; not all that is us. And we are in good company. Actually, we are in the best of company, because Jesus himself had a “Not all this is me” attitude.

The book of Hebrews is about God, revealed to us through Jesus Christ; it is about Christ’s life and suffering on earth. The first few verses simply tell us that over the years God has spoken to people in a variety of ways, but it is most recent that God speaks to us by a Son, Jesus Christ, who is **the reflection of God’s glory and exact imprint of God’s very being. Jesus is the**

real thing; the authentic pioneer of God drenched living, reflecting the glory of God in the flesh and blood experiences of earthly life.

When the Pharisees and Sadducees and town's people and disciples and even those closest to Jesus tried to give him the credit, he was quick to give God the glory and let everyone know it was God working through him that made it possible.

What Christ's example reveals is that **"Who"** we are and the **"Way"** we live is not really about us. Our life is ultimately about God: **"Who"** God is and **"What"** God does. It is God, for whom and through whom all things exist.

But even though life is ultimately about God, we still have a great purpose and possibility. Our purpose is to be God's instruments, vessels, and prisms, like Christ was. Our purpose is to be a witness to God's glory in the world. Our only possibility of accomplishing that, as Christ did, is through following the example of Christ and our only possibility of following the example of Christ is to have the power and presence of the Holy Spirit melting us, molding us, filling us, and using us.

Chapter 2 in Hebrews, which quotes Psalm 8, is "an ode to wonder and holiness of the human creation; connecting us all to the glory of Christ and suggesting that we too can grow toward perfection if we travel the Way of Jesus, the Way of love that gives up life in order to offer life to all." What this passage tells us is that we have been empowered by Jesus Christ through the presence of the Holy Spirit who guides us, and in turn, enables us to do things Christ did, things we may have otherwise thought too difficult or out of our reach. Through the spirit of God, great things happen each day: around us, through us, and to us. I think first of things like being kind to someone you don't know and sharing laughter and joy with a child. Three other things that happen through the spirit of God, in which we will take a closer look, are forgiveness, loving unconditionally, and building the church.

Forgiveness: If someone has done you wrong and you are trying to find the strength to forgive all by yourself, all on your own, you are not going to be able to do it. It is the Holy Spirit within us that enables us to forgive. Our natural reaction when someone hurts us is that we want vengeance! We want to fight and show them a thing or two. We want to "get 'em back." But our preferred human reaction is not a part of Christ's way. Who has someone in their life right now that they need to forgive? We can. First, to be clear, forgiveness is not letting someone off the hook. With forgiveness you are not saying that has been done is alright. Forgiveness

releases you from the grips of the situation. It is like saying, “this situation will no longer have this much control over me.” How do we start to forgive? We first have to be willing to open our hearts up to the Holy Spirit, who will walk with us through our forgiveness.

At a United Methodist Youth Fellowship, there were two brothers, also the town bullies, who had broken into a store and been ordered to attend the youth meetings for 6 months. On the first night they were there, they beat up two 5th graders and threw a hymnal at a lady who met with them and always brought cookies. She ducked in time and then looked them square in their devilish eyes. Then soft as the angel she was, she said, “I don’t approve of what you boys did here tonight, and neither does Jesus. But if he can forgive you (and give you a second chance), I will try to forgive you too.” Then she handed them a plate of cookies.

That is a miracle of forgiveness. If we were to ask that lady today, “How did you put up with those rowdy boys?” she probably would say, “Wasn’t me. Left to my own devices, I would’ve poured the fruit punch on their heads and called the sheriff. But the spirit of Jesus was in me. It was the Holy Spirit within me that gave me strength to forgive.” Whenever we find the strength to forgive, “Not all of that is us” for we are riding on the shoulders of the spirit.

Loving Unconditionally: It’s easy to love those who are attractive to us; those who love us back. But unconditional love- love to all, freely given; love expecting nothing in return; love with no strings attached; love even to those who hurt us. Only God’s Holy Spirit can enable us to love like that; like Jesus loved. Perhaps the most powerful and meaningful symbol of God’s unconditional love for us is found in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.

Today is World Communion Sunday. Today, Christians around the world will gather in worship to receive and participate in eating the bread of life and drinking the cup of salvation. It is a celebration of Christ’s death and resurrection, the ultimate act of unconditional love from a God to all of humanity. It is also the time for all of us to bear witness to the unity of God’s children everywhere as we seek to live out Christ’s command to work for justice and peace in a world that is deeply divided in conflict and war. Today, we gather in worship with people from every time and place believing in the love that holds us all together as God’s children. It is this love, God’s love, given to us through Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit, which calls us all to the table. No matter where we are from, what we look like, when we celebrated this sacrament last, or what we

have done, the bread and the cup are about the love of God to each of us through Jesus Christ.

Build the Church: The third thing the Holy Spirit enables us to do is build the Church. Only the Holy Spirit can empower the Church. Only the Holy Spirit can sustain the Church.

Mr. Holland's Opus is a movie about a dedicated music teacher named Glen Holland. He dreams of becoming a famous composer. He dreams of living in Hollywood and writing theme songs for movies, but he never gets there. He spends his career at John F. Kennedy High School and with great tenderness, he works with a red-haired girl with pigtails, who wants to play the clarinet. No one believes in her, no one helps her, no one encourages her but Mr. Holland. With great compassion he works with an African American student who wants to play the drums but has a terrible time finding the beat. With great patience, he works with a street-wise tough kid who has a lousy attitude and is down on the world. Mr. Holland helps them all, and hundreds like them.

At the conclusion of the film, Mr. Holland retires, and as he cleans out his music room at the high school, he tells his wife and his son that he feels like such a failure. He never accomplished his dream of becoming a famous composer. As he is exiting the school, he hears a noise in the auditorium. He opens the door and sees that the room is packed with all his former students. They give him a long, thunderous standing ovation. They have come back to express their love and appreciation to this wonderful man who gave so much of his life to them. The little girl with pigtails- who is all grown up and now the Governor of the state, goes to the microphone and speaks:

“Mr. Holland, we know that you never got to become the famous composer you dreamed of being, but don't you see? Your greatest composition is what you did with us, your students. Mr. Holland, look around you. We are your great opus! Mr. Holland, we are the music of your life!”

Our calling as a church is to be God's music to the world, singing the song of forgiveness, the song of love, and the song of the Church's great faith. The good news is we don't have to do those things alone. It is God, three in one, who is our strength, guide, inspiration, comfort, teacher. It is God's shoulders that we, as God's children, are invited to ride on for the best ride of our lives. Not all this is us.