



## CONCORD SUNDAY SCHOOL

### LECTIONARY LESSON 14

SUNDAY,  
APRIL 5, 2020

#### **Philippians 2:5-11**

5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

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

7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form,

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

9 Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,

10 so that at the name of 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.

#### **Background**

We turn to the epistles this month. The letters were written before the gospels and circulated to various church communities. It might feel counterintuitive; how is it that these letters are written before the gospels? Don't these letters seem to be responding to the content of the gospels? Who and What is Paul responding to if he didn't have the benefit of these gospels at the time of his writing? As you read, consider the unique situation we are in today. Church communities are scattered throughout the world. Without a safe way to gather in person, letters (or emails, livestreams,

Zooms, or snail mail) become a way to connect over the story and with each other. Consider also that literacy was a sign of status. People who would receive this story likely did not get their own individual copies, but instead, were able to hear the letter orally as it was read by a literate person.

Today's lesson will focus on **being of the same mind when we are physically distant.**

**Read the scripture out loud.**

Discuss with someone in your home. **How has it been to go about your normal life now that you are scattered?**

**What's happening during this passage?**

This letter is written to a specific church within a larger community. It is a letter written to the church at Phillipi, the first congregation in Europe. The passage opens with a call to be united (verse 5) followed by a brief walk-through of Christ's story on Earth (verses 6-8). Given the ways that Christ "humbled himself" and "became obedient," Paul tells us that Christ is the name that should be "exalted above all names. This passage ends with a reminder that "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.

**What are some key themes in this text?**

While the sovereignty of Jesus above Earthly rulers is important in this text, this passage also uplifts the themes of unity and humility. Paul compels his audience to "be of the same mind" as Christ Jesus. We don't tell people to "come together and get along" unless there is an underlying issue of conflict. Paul reminds his audience that our individual actions are a reflection of the larger community. We ought not think higher of ourselves than we ought (Romans 12:3), because Christ is the only name at which we should bow. If we can all get on the same page and be of the same mind, we would be able to accomplish the task God has set before us.

**The word "slave" appears in this passage. What's with that?**

As Afro-Descended people, we are rightfully concerned when we hear the word "slave." New Testament scholars would argue that the kind of "slave" referenced

here is not the same kind of slavery we might be acquainted with here in the United States. And yet, the word might still feel like an eyesore. What other words would you use to describe the form that Christ took on Earth? What are some other words for a selfless person who gives of themselves?

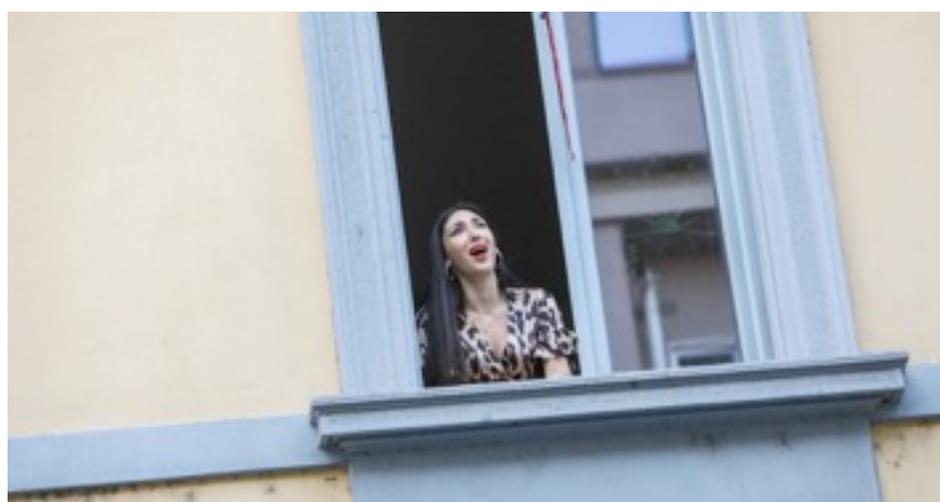
The word “slave” here also feels strange given the latter half of the passage. But somehow, this “slave” was also “exalted” by God. At this name, every knee should “bend” and every tongue shall “confess.” Perhaps those of us who bristle at the word “slave” might be encouraged that even this is the kind of Christ who was chosen by God.

2017 Brotherhood Banquet awardee Rev. Dr. James Hal Cone often wrote about the Blackness of Christ. In his groundbreaking book, “God of the Oppressed,” he argued that the “scandal is that the gospel means liberation, that this liberation comes to the poor, and that it gives them the strength and the courage to break the conditions of servitude.” Christ understands what it means to be poor, to lack a place to sleep, to lose friends, to be worried about his own life. If he understands that, he can certainly understand us right where we are. The good news is that we can be of the same mind of Christ. Let’s get on one page.

*What questions do you still have of this scripture? How will you commit to journeying with this text this week?*

### **Connection to Today’s World**

The coronavirus has changed people’s life all over the world. Sadly, so many have been lost to this devastating disease. In order to curb even more loss, people are



quarantining and sheltering-in-place. Of course, doing so is bound to make even the quietest soul feel lonely. There have been stories of people singing from their balconies in Italy and chanting “keep up the fight” in Wuhan. In New York City, people (especially those who live near hospitals) have been clapping from their windows at 7:00

PM in support of healthcare workers. This image is a reminder that even though we may be spread out, we can still be “of the same mind.” We can commit to taking care

of one another from a safe distance. This moment is difficult and sadly full of loss. How we weather this storm together makes a difference.

**Journal:** Take some time to begin a letter, text message or email to a friend you haven't seen lately.

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**Closing:** Sing "There's Something About That Name."

*Jesus, Jesus, Jesus; there's just something about that name.*

*Master, Savior, Jesus, like the fragrance after the rain;*

*Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, let all Heaven and earth proclaim*

*Kings and kingdoms will all pass away,*

*But there's something about that name.*

*Kings and kingdoms will all pass away,*

*But there's something about that name.*

**Prayer:**

Dear God,

You are the God of our ancestors. We call upon you because you are a constant help and landmark for our lives.

We ask that you keep us connected in new ways. Help us to be of the same mind, both to Christ and to each other. Show us how to focus on You and Your Word. We ask that you make your presence known as we grieve. Comfort those who are mourning, empower those who are working, bless those who are weary.

In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen

**Works Cited:**

<https://www.commondreams.org/news/2020/03/16/kind-triumph-spirit-locke-d-down-italians-singing-balconies-inspire-hope-across-world>

God of the Oppressed, James Cone.

An Introduction to the New Testament, M. Eugene Boring.