

7 June 2015

**The Story of the Son**  
Philippians 2:5-11

*Philippians 2:5-11. 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.*

Before I tell you today's story, I have to set the stage. Two weeks ago, on Pentecost Sunday, I told the story of the Spirit, the breath of God that quickens both life and death. Last Sunday, on Trinity Sunday, I told the story of the Father, the one who has created in love from before the start of time. But they were not separate stories; they were parallel – the same story from two different perspectives. When the Father spoke creation into being, the Spirit was there, blowing across the surface of chaos and breathing life into insensate dust. When the Father chose one people to be his own, the Spirit worked through the voice of the prophets to call that people to relationship with the Father.

And along the way, in both stories, I have mentioned a third person: the Eternal Son, who has also been with the Spirit and the Father from the beginning, was also present at Creation, is also a part of the eternal dance of love that we call "God." Now this is a mystery. How can there be three in one? There is no way to explain it as one might explain a math problem: there are only different ways to picture it. For instance, you have all noticed that when you love others deeply, you feel yourself entwined with them. Their joy is your joy, and their sorrow is your sorrow. Well, the relationship of the Three is like that, but elevated to an infinite degree, because they do not *have* love; they *are* love. And so, there is no differentiation between them. None of the Three can feel or speak or act apart from the others' full participation. They are three; but because they love absolutely they are one. This is important to remember as today I tell the story of the Son.

The world in solemn stillness lay . . . except that it wasn't solemn or still. The world was wracked with pain, injustice, oppression, suffering, deceit, and cruelty. It had been this way almost from the beginning, since the people that the Father had created had turned away and refused the Father's love. The Father had tried everything to bring them back into Covenant, but nothing had changed humanity's willful rebellion. The Father had punished them, and they only grew angry with the Father. The Father chose one people – the children of Abraham – to represent Covenant to the world, but Abraham's descendants were seldom the sort of example that the Father had hoped. The Father rescued them from slavery and brought them to a good land, but the people complained that they had not been given more, then offered thanksgiving offerings to the gods of other nations. The Father gave them laws, simple black-and-white instructions on how to live in covenant, and the people began breaking them before they had even been written down. The Spirit anointed judges and kings to lead the people of Abraham back to love, and the judges and kings too often led them astray. The Spirit filled prophets to expose their rebellion and call the people to return, and they ignored or executed the prophets. And so the Father had let his people suffer the consequences of rebellion. Their nation and temple were destroyed, and the people taken into exile. Over the next centuries they were subjects of a string of empires – Babylon, Persia, Greece – until finally they fell under the cruellest of all, the bloody empire of Rome, which enforced her laws with torture and massacre and fear. No, the world did not lie in solemn stillness.

But the Father had not given up on the people, not yet, not ever, for the Father is love, and love knows how to wait, but not how to surrender. And so it came about, in days of the Roman Empire, that a baby was born to a virgin of the daughters of Abraham. Her name was Miriam, and she gave birth to a son in the town of Bethlehem, the home of a great king of the past named David. She and her husband Yoseph called the boy Yeshua. There were strange manifestations around Yeshua's birth – signs in the stars, visits from heavenly messengers – and those who knew of those signs wondered if this boy would grow up to be a king, a revolutionary

who would gather together an army and drive out the hated Romans. It was not until much later, after Yeshua had gone, that some realized the truth: this had been none other than the Eternal Son of the Father, who had been born into his own creation as a man, a member of the rebellious race of Adham. The Father and the Spirit had been unable to entice Adham to return to love, and so now the Son, Love himself, would go to Adham.

And what a man he was! Challenging, encouraging, humble, courageous, reconciling, threatening, and most of all different from any other man, for that was a part of the plan: to show Adham what he had been created to be. Yeshua, even as a child, showed himself to be wiser than the religious leaders of his day, yet he chose to begin his work by being immersed in the river by a radical sectarian named Yonah the Dunker. He went at once to the poorest, weakest of the people, tending to their simple physical needs. He healed the lame, gave sight to the blind, opened the ears of the deaf, and loosened the tongues of the mute. When people were hungry for food, he gave them food. And when they were hungry beyond their bodies, he taught them the way of life.

But his teachings, too, were not like anyone else's. They were threatening to nearly all that the people had been taught to hold dear. Abraham's children had been taught by their religious leaders to obey the laws to the tiniest detail; Yeshua ignored, even openly flouted, the details of the law and taught people to love God and others. They had been taught to revere the religious establishment – their priests and their rebuilt temple – but Yeshua denounced the priests as hypocrites, overturned the workings of the temple, then added that it was soon going to be destroyed again anyway. They had been taught that their acceptance by the Father depended on keeping themselves pure – and so they had to avoid all contact with sinful people – but Yeshua taught them that acceptance by the Father came through humble repentance and love for others, and then Yeshua went and had dinner with prostitutes and Roman collaborators. They had been taught that they, the children of Abraham, were special and to avoid contact with all other nations, especially Samaritans, but Yeshua healed and fed the people of other nations just as he healed and fed the people of Abraham, and he visited the cities of Samaria, where he made friends with an outcast Samaritan woman with a bad reputation. And the people of Abraham, like all people everywhere, had been taught that success had to do with how much money and how many possessions they had piled up, but Yeshua told them not to worry about such things, but to seek the Father first and leave the rest in the Father's hands. As I said, the Son was not like anyone, before or since.

And so the Eternal Son in the flesh, Yeshua, threatened nearly everyone and everything: he threatened established priorities, calcified hatreds, cherished delusions of self-importance, and most of all threatened those people who had become powerful in society. He had to be done away with. And so he was. The religious leaders of Abraham's people had him arrested and charged with treason. Curiously, the primary charge they brought against him was that of predicting the destruction of the temple. They handed him over to the Romans who knew he had done nothing wrong but who didn't mind adding another execution to the schedule. He was killed, brutally, and buried.

What happens when one who existed before time enters into the dimension of time and then is killed? Here is what happened: Death itself collapsed in disarray. The Son, still Yeshua but more than Yeshua, rose on the Third Day and went about visiting people he loved. And what happens when One who has never rebelled against the Father – who could not rebel against the Father, because he and the Father were one – becomes one of a race of rebels, enduring the consequences of their rebellion? Here is what happened: Punishment was revoked and a new precedent was established. Now, those who join themselves to the Son, insofar as they are able, and who live humble lives of love according to the model of the Son, are set free from judgment. A new sort of life has begun in them, the life that Yeshua had modeled.

This is the story of the Son, but it is also the story of the Spirit, and the story of the Father. The Father did not *send* the Son to overcome death and rebellion, for wherever the Son goes, there is the Father, and whatever the Son does, the Father does with him. The story is now complete, but it is not done just yet, at least not for us. The world still groans in rebellion; we still have a shattering, threatening, and transforming message to proclaim, and the Spirit of God – well, she still hovers over the surface of chaos, bringing life. Thanks be to God. All Three.