

Last weekend I had the pleasure of spending some time with my fellow Emmaus students and several leaders within the ICCC denomination in Montreat, North Carolina. As part of the retreat we had the opportunity to explore the lectionary, spend time in prayer, fellowship and communion. A major part of the weekend, however, was the exploration of Theology. Many questions were posed during this time covering topics from the means to salvation to the on going debate of evolution verses creation. One pressing issue of theology centered around the Trinity, more specifically for some the dual nature of Christ, fully God and full human. The message for you tonight is spawned from this debate. Tonight we take a look at *The Paradox that is Christ Jesus*.

Let us Pray . . .

Para means contrary and *doxa* means opinion, and so a paradox deals with contrary opinions or ideas which are seemingly so opposite they cannot both be true, but which are, in fact, both true. They sound contradictory but they really complement each other. In paradox two opposite and

contradictory ideas can be shown to be two parts of a greater whole larger than either of them alone. Two men can be looking at a shield from each side of it, and one says it is gold and the other that it is a silver shield. Both know they are right for they are looking at it right in front of their face. They can argue for ever and never convince the other to change their view. They can only resolve their conflict by going to the other side and seeing that a shield can be gold on one side and silver on the other. Both were right, but both were wrong too, because they only saw part of the whole truth about the shield.

The false assumption in many conflicts is that if one side is certain they are right, any contrary idea must be wrong. This is false because it is possible for both to be right even though they seem contradictory. Paradox says that opposite perspectives can both be right.

Take a snowstorm as an illustration. A family of 4 can see it from 4 different perspectives. The mother sees the snow as a source of beauty as she looks out of her picture window and sees her evergreens beautified with the white fluffy stuff. The father

sees it as a nuisance as he has to shovel the drive way and be late for work because of the traffic mess. The son sees it as a source of income because the neighbors will pay him to shovel for them. The little girl sees it as a source of fun, for now she can use the new sled she got for her birthday. What could be more futile than a debate to determine which of them is right? Three of them find pleasure, and only one finds pain in the snow, and so can the issue be decided by majority vote? This would not change the fact that the father still has to suffer while the other three enjoy it. We need to face it. It is a paradox. A snowfall is both pleasure and pain. It is both beautiful and a nuisance. You cannot get everybody on the same side, for there are two sides, and both are real and legitimate.

A 'paradoxical tension' is when the two contradictory truths hold each other accountable; in a sense, each keeps the other true. For example, one truth is that we are called on to be excellent, to do the best we can, to stretch our abilities for our own good and for the good of others. If we don't, it renders us unable to be much help for anyone, no matter what is going on

inside us. Another truth, though, is that we are not to measure our worth or our relationship with God by what we do or how well we do it. If we value ourselves on how well we do things, we'd either be ashamed or self-righteously proud. If we see others on such a scale, we pass judgment or idolize. The two paradoxical truths (about excellence and true worth) hold each other in balance, giving us an attitude that is balanced and real.

Paul in his letter to the Philippians writes, "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." In other words, recognize there are other perspectives than your own, and you need to be sensitive to them or you will be a self-centered person. Paul's words provide a nice segue into today's lectionary reading. Let's look at verse 5 and 6.

⁵Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,

It is not uncommon for people to try to disprove the doctrine of the Holy Trinity by pointing out verses that they believe

demonstrate the inferiority of Jesus to the Father. For example, some may quote John 14:28 where Jesus says, “. . . my Father is greater than I,” or John 20:17 where Jesus refers to God as *His* God. Do versus such as these disprove the doctrine of the Holy Trinity? No! The very incarnation of Christ is in itself a paradox. Jesus was not only fully God as affirmed here in verse 6 but was also fully human, as is clearly stated in verse 7.

A couple of weeks ago we read Paul’s words concerning the wisdom of man and the foolishness of God. In his first letter to the Corinthians Paul wrote, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” You see, the point that many of those who try to disprove the Trinity are missing is that you cannot begin to read and understand the word without first having a true understanding of its nature. That is, we must realize that Jesus sometimes speaks from His humanity and at other times from His Divinity. In His humanity Jesus is inferior to the Father in office, position and stature; but in His Divinity He is equal with the Father.

Let's continue with verses 7 and 8.

⁷but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!

Remember that there is a larger context to this passage. Recall our earlier tension; "Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves . . . let each of you look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Paul is persuading the Philippians to be humble and to put the interests of others first, he then illustrates this by using Christ as the supreme example of one who did just that; One who *humbled* Himself for others.

Philippians 2:7 – 8 is not saying that Jesus is a creature of the creation; nor is it saying that Jesus gave up any of His divine qualities. Instead it is saying that Jesus who *is* God took on the *form of a man*. It is not saying that the Son of God set aside any of His divine qualities or attributes. It is saying that Jesus gave

up the status and *privilege that were His in heaven*. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 8:9 of Christ, saying of Him: "*thou he were rich . . . for your sake [He] became poor,*" once again speaking of the privilege of and honor that He deserved but temporarily gave up for our sake.

I want to stress that what these verses do affirm and teach is that Jesus is not only 100% God but that he also is 100% man! Again, for emphasis, Philippians 2:5 – 8 does not say that Jesus released Himself of His Divinity! The passage is saying that Jesus set aside His glory and assumed the form of a man; which is the necessary state for the proper atonement of mankind.

Next, verse 9 through 11.

⁹*Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should
bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is
Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

What does this say? A name above every name! The passage reinforces the idea that Jesus is the Lord Almighty; if He isn't God then we have a problem because it then conflicts with the writings of Isaiah 42:8 in which the Lord Himself says that He will not share His glory with another! Furthermore, verse 11 affirms for us to worship Jesus! In context with the whole passage, it is teaching that we are to worship Jesus because He is God and we are able to fully trust Him. The very truth that we are able to fully trust Him is essential to the significance of the passage. Jesus is God and we are to worship Him and trust him for only God can be our Savior.

If your hear nothing else tonight please hear this and let these words from Isaiah fill your spirit, "*I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no Savior.*" Know that Jesus *cannot* be our Savior unless *He is* fully God!

We live in a world that is seeking significance and yet views everything as insignificant because we taught that truth must be relative to the beholder. That is, if you see things differently than I do, then one of us *must* be wrong. We fail to stop and consider

the possibility that we may both be right, or at least that our perspectives may not be in conflict, but rather in paradox. People within our own communities find it difficult to put their faith and trust in basic theologies of Christianity because we are bound and determined to be right and in order to be right, someone must be wrong!

As a result, we live among a people that chase after every new move of spirituality that hits our shores because they no longer know how to weigh the facts before them to determine their own significance. We as a body of believers must encourage those around us to stop listening to the world, to stop trying to figure out on our own what it is the world has to offer us or rather why the world is rejecting us and offer up to them the paradox that is Christ Jesus; fully human and fully God; a Savior born into poverty; a King that came to serve rather than to be served; the one who came not to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it.

What could be more significant and life changing than to realize and come to understand that the founder of the entire universe died for the atonement of your sins? What holds more

value and significance in our lives today than to believe and be rebirthed in the knowledge that you are a saint of God covered by the infinitely significant blood of Jesus Christ? I stand before you tonight as a testimony to the love, grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. He has brought me out of darkness and into light and he can do the same for you. Jesus loves you and has no desire for you to suffer under His command, neither under the pressures and prejudices of this world nor under the weight of your own pain and persecution.

A wise man once observed that the dove Noah released from the ark soared across the wide seas that engulfed the land, found no where to perch, and again returned to the vessel. In much the same way man has departed from the truths of the Bible, using his wings of enlightenment, independence and privilege to seek distant horizons and strange lands. Not only do I speak of those who have known the love of God and have turned away from the Church but also of those who have known His love and have in turned used his word as a sword of persecution; fostering their own desires and prejudices. Like the weary dove, however,

many have through the years returned to the changeless certainty of God's Word after following years of aimless flight and it is my prayer that those who today are divided by prejudice will one day be reunited by the Cross.

In a time where economic hardships have forced many to reevaluate their priorities, finances and worldly views, we, too, as servants of Christ Jesus find ourselves in a time of spiritual famine; one that has spread through our land forcing believers and nonbelievers alike to grasp at straws and follow every wind of doctrine. Some would rather spout out religious slogans; speaking of love, healing and the blood of Christ as an atonement for all people in the same way they speak about their favorite TV show or what they had for dinner last night. The overall theme is clear to them; they know that it is their favorite show because they watch it weekly on Tuesday; the one and only night they have free from their otherwise busy schedule. And Egg Plant Parmesan, well that is their favorite meal because it is what their mother used to make for them when they were really good or deserved special praise. Aside from that, however, they couldn't

tell you the name of more than two or three characters on the show and if they thought of it long enough, they are not sure that their favorite dish has the same zeal that it use to. What exactly is eggplant, anyway? To put it more simply, people are content doing as they have always done and believing what they have always believed because it is comfortable and familiar. In order to understand what and why we believe, we must be willing step outside of our comfort zones and to ponder what we believe.

Though each one of us within the body of Chrstit may be great or small, every one of us has at least one talent that we can offer to ourselves, our families, our friends, and our community of faith. Most importantly, we must recognize that within each of these groups there are souls that are lost. Each one of us can witness the glory and magnificence of Christ Jesus, our Divine Savior, and each one of us can be that witness and share His love with those around us.

It has been written that Chris showed His love by dying for us and that we show our love by living for Him. I ask you today to also consider that while the natural man may ask the question

what is the meaning of life; we as Christians may ask, "how are we to die."

I leave you today with a few lines written by the poet Everest. Though the words are few, they hold a powerful message for our own life and death in Christ.

*Take up thy cross and follow on, nor think till death
to lay it down, for only he who bears the cross may
hope to wear the glorious crown.*

Godspeed and God Bless.

Amen.