

PALM SUNDAY
“THE GRASP OF ADAM,
THE GIFT OF JESUS”
Philippians 2:5-11

“He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.”

That’s a powerful statement the Apostle Paul makes about Jesus. That little phrase is like a key that unlocks the whole meaning of Jesus’ journey to the cross. It tells us something about who Jesus is and what he willingly gave up for us.

The word “grasped” describes what Jesus chose **not** to do. It suggests a conscious choice not to cling to his divine privilege.

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The very Son of God, the one who existed in perfect unity with the Father – He didn’t consider his divine status something to be fiercely held onto, something he had to grasp and never let go. It wasn’t about protecting his rights or demanding his due. This is a powerful picture of His humility and selfless love, isn’t it?

In a way, it makes us think about someone else—someone before Jesus, who looked at something that **wasn’t** fully his and thought, **“That’s mine for the taking! I will grasp it!”** And who was that... who stands in complete contrast to Jesus’ selfless humility? Adam! Think back to the Garden of Eden. He already **had** paradise, perfect fellowship with God, but he saw something more – equality with God – and he grasped for it, disobeying God’s command. Jesus, on the other hand, although truly equal with God, chose the very opposite path. He let go. He **emptied** himself. This comparison with Adam highlights just how radical Jesus’ humility truly is.

Think back to that moment in the Garden. Satan, the master deceiver, slithered in with a tempting whisper, ***“Oh, you won’t really die! God’s just holding out on you. Eat this fruit, and your eyes will pop open, and you’ll be like God!”*** It wasn’t really about the fruit of the tree, was it? It was about that tempting promise: **to be like God**, to have that same **equality**. So, Adam and Eve reached out, and the scripture says they **grasped** the fruit. But their real desire that Satan exploited, wasn’t for a piece of fruit. It was for that **perceived equality** with God, a status that was never theirs to grasp. Their grasping led to **separation**, to **death**, to **everything broken in our world**.

But then comes Jesus. Remember who He is – **very God of God, Light from Light, true God from true God**, as we just confessed in the Nicene Creed. He’s the Son of God, **equal to the Father in his divine nature**, as the Athanasian Creed so clearly states. Yet, this very God, this one who possessed **equality** with the Father from all eternity, didn’t cling to that power, didn’t hold onto that glory as something to be grasped at all costs. Instead, ***he emptied himself. He made himself nothing, willingly taking on the very form of a servant, being born in our human likeness.*** He did the exact opposite of Adam. Adam reached for something he didn’t have; Jesus willingly gave up what was rightfully His. And how far did he go in this self-emptying? How low did he descend? Paul tells us: ***“And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.”*** The King of Kings, nailed to the wood of the cross. The ultimate act of letting go, for you, for me, for all of humanity.

What a huge contrast! **Adam grasped**, reaching for something forbidden. **Jesus gave**, willingly letting go of everything. Adam was marked by **disobedience**, a defiant “NO” to God. Jesus was the epitome of obedience, a resounding “YES” even to the point of death. And their deaths? Worlds apart, too. Adam’s death was **the just consequence**, the bitter fruit of his rebellion. But Jesus? He was **innocent**. He deserved no such end. Yet, he embraced death, not for his own sin, but to atone for Adam’s sin. And for your sin too. All those times you’ve been disobedient, all the things you’ve tried to grasp for yourself, all the ways you’ve fallen short—Jesus took that. That’s what He grasped on that cross—**YOU**, in all your **brokenness**, with all your **sins**, even **death and hell itself**. He stepped into that darkness to undo what Adam had done, to break the chains of sin and death. And in its place, he offers you **forgiveness, a clean slate**, and the gift of true, **eternal life**, even in the midst of this world still marked by sin and death.

And that’s the incredible story we’re about to hear again **this week we call Holy**. The story of how Jesus, out of pure love, gave himself completely for you. How he refused to defend himself against false accusations, how he chose not to call down **legions of angels** to save himself from the agony of the cross. Instead, he embraced **humility**; he walked the path of obedience, all the way to death, even death on a cross—for you. Let that sink in. This isn’t just a historical event; it’s a deeply personal act of love, reaching down through the centuries to touch your very heart today.

For all of us who, even now, in our daily lives, still find ourselves, grasping for that same perceived **equality with God**. Think about it. Don’t we do it when **we** decide what’s right and wrong based on our own opinions and feelings, rather than humbly submitting to the clear teachings of God’s Word? Isn’t it a form of grasping when we insist on being in control, wresting control from God’s loving hands because we think our way is better? What about when we allow doubts to creep in, questioning God’s love and secretly believing we could somehow manage things more effectively? And isn’t it the ultimate act of grasping when we expect God to fit into our mold, to conform to our desires, instead of humbly bending our will to His? These aren’t just ancient temptations; they’re the very ways we, today, continue to echo Adam’s sin, still **reaching for a sense of equality** with the One who already holds all power and love.

And so, recognizing our own tendency to grasp, our own struggles with humility and obedience, we rightly pray for God’s help. We prayed in the Collect this morning: **“Mercifully grant that we may follow the example of His great humility and patience”**—the very humility and patience we’ve just witnessed in Christ’s journey to the cross. And through that example, by His grace alone, **“be made partakers of His glorious resurrection.”** Notice how the Collect points us back to Jesus’ self-emptying love and forward to the hope that lies beyond the cross? It’s in embracing His humility, in letting go of our own grasping, that we find our truest hope in His victory over death.

It starts with repentance. With each of us humbling ourselves, looking honestly into the mirror of our hearts, and admitting, **“I am a poor, miserable grasper.”** We confess that we reach not only for what belongs to others, not just for things we shouldn’t have, but for something far greater and more dangerous: **a false sense of equality with God**. And then, in that humility, we receive what we could never, ever grasp for ourselves: the free and complete forgiveness of our sin, our rebellion, our grasping. We acknowledge that there’s no excuse for our failings. We understand that if we’re to be made right with God, and raised from the death grip of our sin, it can’t come from within ourselves. It must be a gift, freely given to us from the outside, by

the One who was perfectly humble and obedient, who died not for his own transgressions, but for ours. And who now lives, victorious over death, to pour out his life into us. That humble admission is the very first step.

But the story doesn't end with repentance and forgiveness! Having been made ***"partakers of His resurrection"*** through that incredible gift of forgiveness, our lives are changed. We not only bow in humility before God, acknowledging our need for Him, but we also extend that same humility towards others, in acts of selfless service. We begin to live this new, resurrection life by laying down our own desires, our own agendas, for the sake of those around us. We forgive freely, we offer help generously, we love unconditionally--not as a way to earn God's favor or atone for our past sins, because Christ has already done that perfectly. Instead, we serve because that's the very nature of the One who has atoned for us. That's the pattern of the new life He's breathed into us. It's no longer a life defined by grasping for personal greatness or recognition, but a life characterized by humbly serving, lifting others up, making them great in God's eyes. That's the very essence of Jesus. He's God – he had nothing to gain by lowering himself, yet he did it all for us. And because of what He's done, we, as children of God, also have nothing to gain by grasping for ourselves. And so, empowered by His love, we can now freely lower ourselves in the same way, serving and loving others. That's what it truly means to ***have the mind of Christ living in us.***

At the beginning of our service today, we heard the joyous shouts as Jesus humbly entered Jerusalem, not on a warhorse, but riding on a simple donkey. Now, we're about to hear the contrasting story of how he humbly leaves that same city, not in triumph, but carrying the heavy burden of a cross. We remembered at Christmas the great humility of his birth, a King born in a stable. And now, we turn our hearts to the ultimate expression of his humility: his death on that very cross. This is God's love displayed in the most powerful and unexpected way. This is God, not grasping for power or glory, but emptying himself completely, even unto death, for the sake of our salvation. As you listen to this powerful story unfold this week, let it shape your hearts and lives.

And the story of Jesus' humble love doesn't end with the cross. Later in our service, as He does each Lord's Day, He continues to come to us in the simple bread and wine of **His Holy Supper**. This isn't just ordinary food and drink; it is His very Body and Blood, given to us for the **forgiveness of our sins**, the **strengthening of our faith**, and the **promise of the resurrection and eternal life** we so desperately need. Instead of us futilely grasping for a **false equality with God**, He turns to us and says, "Here. Grasp this." He invites us to ***"Take and eat," "Take and drink."*** He says, ***"Here I am, fully present for you. Here is the very nourishment your soul longs for. Here's the forgiveness you cannot earn. Here's the life you cannot create for yourself."*** In this humble meal, Jesus continues to give, not expecting us to grasp, but offering himself freely.

And so, the very God who willingly humbled himself, even to the point of death, and who has now been exalted to the highest place, promises that same exaltation to us. He assures us that just as He entered into our human experience, even our death, so too will we one day be where He is, in glory. And just as we confess Him now, in faith, as our Lord and Savior, so we'll confess Him forever in the fullness of His kingdom. This isn't about our own grasping for glory, but about God's gracious promise to share His victory with us, all because of the humble love He showed us on the cross. Let that hope fill your hearts today, this week, and always. In the Name of Jesus, Amen.

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