

Philippians 2:1-13 N.T. 186 (NRSV)

¹If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, ²make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, ⁷but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, ⁸he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

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

¹²Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

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“Selfless in a Selfie World”

Opening Prayer: Please bow with me in prayer. Oh God, in this hour as we step away from a self-absorbed world, allows us to hear your voice and instruct us in the ways of your coming kingdom. Make us a people worthy of your calling. In Jesus’ Name we pray, **Amen.**

Introduction: **35 years ago**, back in the 1980’s, to have a cell phone was the ultimate of status symbols, especially in the business world. I remember meeting with a venture capitalist one day **who had one of these**. They weren’t called cell phones yet; they were bag phones. I remember the fellow telling me that the phone cost him **about \$1,200 a month**. If you had something like this, you had to be rich and important. **Now days it seems** like most everyone has a cell phone. And it’s still a status symbol of sorts, but not so much among businesspeople as among teens and people in their early 20s. **You can be the envy** of your friends if you’re the first to get an iPhone 11 Pro. But of course, today a cell phone isn’t just a phone, it’s a smart phone. It’s an electronic device not only used for talking but for texting, and listening to music, and playing video games, and web surfing, and taking pictures all rolled up into one sleek looking little gadget. Oh, **and now days** smart phones have two cameras, one facing the world, and the other facing you.

It was just over fifteen years ago when they first started building digital cameras into cell phones, and **I remember the YMCA** where I belonged posting a big sign like this on the locker room doors explicitly forbidding cell phones. **Now days**, teens take countless cell phone pictures standing in front of the school’s bathroom mirrors. In fact, collectively we all take so many pictures like this that **society has invented a new word** for these kind of pictures—they’re selfies. **Samsung estimates** that 30% of all pictures shared over social media everyday are selfies, making them the most popular type of photo.

By-in-large most selfies taken are in good fun. After all, most selfies aren't really selfies, they're pictures taken with a group of friends. But in the middle of this, there's one very disturbing trend. **People**, particularly younger people, who seem to be obsessed with taking selfies of themselves. Virtually every picture they post is of themselves by themselves. They are constantly trying to strike just the right pose or to portray just the right look. **Psychologist call this** "narcissism," an excessive interest in yourself. But our Bible lesson today clearly say, "**In humility value others above yourselves**" (Philippians 2:3, NIV). As followers of Jesus, once again we're called to buck the popular tend. God calls us to be like Jesus. **We're not to** focus inward, we're to focus outward. **We're to be** "Selfless in a Selfie World."

PAUSE

Move I.

We all need to guard against being selfish. On some level we all know this. **From when we were toddlers**, our parents and pre-school teachers taught us the importance of sharing. That's a good start, but what God expects goes further than that. **God expects us** to use our blessings to bless others.

If we look back some 2,800 years to the seventh Century B.C., when the **prophet Micah** was active in Judah, we learn God's expectations. God had blessed the people of Judah, he had delivered them from slavery in Egypt and established them in their own land, but now Judah's government had become as corrupt and oppressive as the Egyptians had been. God's upset with the people so Micah asked point blank **"What does the LORD require of you?"** (Micah 6:8, NRSV) to which God answers in a way that applies just as much to us today as it did to the people of Judah all of those years ago. God expects us **"To do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with [our] God."** In whatever ways God blesses us, we're to bless others. **God doesn't** bless us so we can hoard our blessings. **God doesn't** bless us so we can indulge our every desire. **God doesn't** bless us so we can buy a fancier house, and a cottage on the lake, and fill our garage with recreational vehicles. **God blesses** us so we can be the instruments of God's blessing to others. God gives more to us so we can give more to others.

It's in Luke that Jesus tells us that **"From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required"** (Luke 12:48, NRSV). **God doesn't** give you more so you can have more. **God doesn't** give you more so you can spend more on yourself. **God doesn't** give you more so you can be stingy. **God gives you** more so you can be more generous. Simply put, God gives you more so you can give more. Earlier in that same passage Jesus said, **"Life is not measured by how much you own"** (Luke 12:15, NLT). **The cars**, the house, the cash, they're not the measure. God wants us to be generous, **and if we're not**, we're stingy.

But of course, God's not only concerned that we share our material possessions. God's just as concerned that we share our time and talents, and even our affections. In any way to be anything less than generous is to be stingy. **This brings us back** to Narcissism—any excessive interest in yourself— your money, your time, your talent, even your affections. **If you're not careful** you can easily end up believing life centers around you. Only when you're needs are completely met can you possibly give anything to anyone else. **That's narcissistic** thinking.

It may be helpful to remember where the word narcissism comes from. **In ancient Greek Mythology** there's a story of **Narcissus**, a strapping young man, **and Echo**, a fair young maiden. **One day Narcissus** is walking through a wooded-mountain valley when Echo catches a glimpse of him from a distance and, for her, **its love at first sight**. Sensing someone behind him, Narcissus turns and calls out, "*Who's there?*," to which Echo replies "*Who's there?*" After an awkward silence, **Echo runs to embrace Narcissus only to have him reject her** advances and turn away telling her to **leave him alone**. **Heartbroken**, Echo wonders through the mountain valleys mindlessly repeating whatever she hears anyone say. **Then Nemesis**, the goddess of revenge, learns of Echo's rejected plight, so Nemesis decides to punish Narcissus. **She lures Narcissus** to come to glassy pool where Narcissus **falls in love** with his own reflection. But when his reflection fails to respond to his affections, **he kills himself in despair**.

This is a classic painting of the climactic scene from that ancient tale. There's Narcissus mesmerized by his own reflection while sitting nearby is the fair madden Echo ready to share her affections with him if he would just notice that she's there. **This is the tragedy** of being self-absorbed. The real joys of life pass us by. **Yes, we really do all need to guard against being selfish**.

End I.

Move II.

● **Because our real value is never in any serious doubt.** It's not uncommon to feel vulnerable and insecure. The world is big and **our place in it seems so small.** We feel we might get lost in the crowd. We fear we might be overlooked. **So, there's a natural tendency** to assert ourselves to show we have power over at least our little slice of the universe. **It's kinda like Don Knotts** who played Barney Fife in the 1960's sitcom *Andy in Mayberry*. **He was the bumbling** but lovable sidekick to Sheriff Andy Taylor. **He had a badge** and he had a gun and in his little slice of the universe he was gonna be something. He couldn't wait for the day when the Sheriff had to go out of town so he could be in charge. It made for great comedy, but it was also a slightly tragic tale. **Barney lacked** self-confidence. He was never really comfortable being who he was. And who he really was, **was a beloved member** of the community of Mayberry.

Our Bible Lesson today from Paul's letter to the believers at Philippi provides some reassurance to the little bit of Barney Fife in all of us. **We are who we are** not because of anything that we have done, but because of what God has done for us through his one and only Son, Jesus Christ. We're something not because of a badge or a gun, or a title or a position, **but because of place** in God's family. Paul reminds us that as we try to fit into life, we can rest assured of our identity in Christ Jesus our Lord. **Jesus had no doubt** who he was, so he didn't need to exert his authority to do what God sent him to do. Jesus was confident that everything would go according to plan **even when that** included dying on a cross.

The passage in the middle of our Bible Lesson today is a hymn that was probably used in many of the first century churches spread through the Roman Empire and beyond. That hymn opens with a bold statement about Jesus that Paul tells us we need to imitate. **In Philippians 2:6-7a (NRSV)** Paul recites the opening stanza of that early hymn:

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.

Think about that, Jesus was no one less than God himself in the flesh, he was, and is, and always will be important. But not once did he exert his position, or throw around his weight, to do what God sent him to do. He became one more obedient servant among all of God's obedient servants. If equality with God isn't something us mere mortals can fully grasp, **then being a son or daughter** of God isn't something us mere mortals can fully grasp either. But we can go about our daily lives with the self-assurance that because of Jesus, that's exactly who we are.

Remember the reality TV show *Undercover Boss*? Each weekly episode featured the president or CEO of some large corporation going undercover to work in rank and file positions at the bottom of the corporate ladder. For most of these executives it's an eye opening and humbling experience. **The very first show** in season one featured Larry O'Donnell, the President of Waste Management, spending a week working at entry level positions at Waste Management landfills and recycling plants, **and even working** on a garbage collection truck. In one stint at a landfill, **O'Donnell's job was** to pick up litter blowing around the landfill site. The goal was to pick one trash bag of litter every ten minutes. But Larry just couldn't seem to get the hang of it, so before the end of his shift, **his supervisor fired him**. It was a humbling experience for Larry O-Donnell, **but at the end** of the day O-Donnell was still President of Waste Management. His real position was never in any doubt.

At the end of our days we're still the sons and daughters of God. **Because our real value is never in any serious doubt too.**

End II.

Move III.

So, we need to always look out for the interests of others. None of us are an island unto ourselves, **we are all part** of a community. And that means we all have to do our part. Think about your own life. What are the communities that you're part of? **Well it all starts** with our families. We have parents, and grandparents. We have children, grandchildren, and siblings, and uncles, and aunts, and nieces, and nephews. If one rejoices you all rejoice and if one of hurts you all hurt. **You are also part of some** other communities, there's community where you work, and the community where you live and play. In each of those communities you have your part. If you do your part, the whole community benefits, and if you don't do your part, the whole community suffers.

The same is of course true within the community of Christ. All you here this morning are a member or friend of this church. The church is "many kinds of people, with many kinds of faces, all colors, and all ages, too, from all times and places." Of all of the communities that we're part of, the church is the oldest, and the church is the only one that's gonna survive into eternity. So, are you looking out for the interest of the people in this church? Are you doing your part? If you do, everybody benefits, if you don't everybody suffers. When it comes to being a Christian **no one is an island unto themselves**.

What does it mean to look out for the interest of others? **Well, that means** that you stop focusing primarily only of yourself and you make a conscious effort to make room for focusing on others. **You keep expanding** your circle **from yourself, to your family, to your community, and most of all to your church.** **You are important, but you are not** the most important person in your life.

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I remember back when I was in Union City that one of the sisters of a woman in the church there was having her 35th birthday and she decided to do it differently. **Her name is Angela**—she’s the one in the middle of the picture. Usually birthdays become self-indulgent moments where we allow the attention to focus on us while family and friends shower us with well wishes and presents. But Angela wanted a different kind of birthday. Rather than focusing inward **she decided to focus outward**. So, on her 35th birthday Angela and her sister and some friends all went out **and performed 35 random acts of kindness**. **They took flowers** to the cancer center to give to each of the patients, **they surprised** friends with coffee, **they paid** meters for people when the meter lady was coming for them, and even taped coins to vending machines at Gannon for students. But the high point of the day came when they stopped to see one of Angela’s favorite teachers who’s been battling cancer **only to find out** that he’d gotten one of the flowers they’d left at the Cancer Center earlier in the day. Yes, it’s a small world and God does still work in mysterious ways. **And at day’s end** this is how Angela summed up her most unusual day, “**My heart is full**; it’s been a great birthday!”

The key verse of our Bible lesson today is **Philippians 2:3b (NRSV)**, “**Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.**” Imagine if you lived everyday like Angela lived her 35th birthday. **Now imagined** if everyone else did that everyday too. **So yes, we do need to always look out for the interests of others.**

End III.

Conclusion: 30% of the pictures shared on the social media everyday are selfies. People are obsessed with striking just the right pose and portraying just the right look. Narcissism is on the rise. **Yes, we really do all need to guard against being selfish.** Our reflection will never return our affection. When we're self-absorbed, the joys of life will pass us by. **Because our real value is never in any serious doubt too.** We are who we are because Jesus is who he is. **So yes, we do need to always look out for the interests of others.** We are all important, but none of us is the most important person in our own lives. God calls us to be *“Selfless in a Selfie World.”*

{Play Video *“Let’s Forget About Ourselves.mp4”* [0:43]}

Closing Prayer: Let’s pray. Oh God, our lives are not our own. Christ’s makes us one with God and one with each other in ministry to all the world. May Christ increase as we decrease. **Amen!**

10:00 Closing Hymn: “Precious Name” Red Hymnal No. 536

All Four Verses

Sending Forth: Are your needs overwhelming? Does the need to feel happy consume you? Then stop focusing on yourself and start focusing on others today. Go forth and be *“Selfless in a Selfie World.”* **And all of God’s people said...Amen!**