

## *The Fullness of an Empty Heart*

Philippians 2.1-9  
(The Message)

All Saints Sunday  
October 31, 2010

For most people, God can be found most clearly  
in and through others. The love of others is  
the love of God woven into the stories of our lives.

- Anonymous

### *Reading*

If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care— then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand. Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death— and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion. Because of that obedience, God lifted him high and honored him far beyond anyone or anything...

On the Upper East Side in Manhattan the Regency Hotel is the venue of choice for power breakfasts. Should you need to hob knob with the movers and shakers in New York, should there be someone you need to impress, intimidate, or otherwise coerce into a deal, head for breakfast at the Regency Hotel. I was oblivious to this fact several years ago when my family moved to New York and spent our first night in the city at the Regency. We booked a room there, truth be known, simply because it was close to our new home, and they accepted pets without an exorbitant deposit. When we walked into the restaurant for breakfast the next morning, however, it was impossible to ignore the intensity in the room. All around us *suits* were busy making deals or trying to be noticed. After all, they were eating breakfast at the

---

*James R. "Bo" Crowe*  
*Overland Park Christian Church*

Regency. As I surveyed the room, I noticed Larry King sitting across from us, and he was gazing intently at me. He didn't recognize me, you see, and that seemed to bother him. I guess he thought that he knew, or should know, all the movers and shakers in the city.

Mr. King and I didn't cut a deal or become fast friends that day, but my family and I managed to enjoy our breakfast nonetheless. I mention this experience because it strikes me that the aggressive attitudes and inflated egos present in that room stand in stark contrast to the attitude of humility sketched by Paul for the church at Philippi. As a matter of fact, movers and shakers would never choose humility as a weapon for their arsenal. What does humility have to do with strength? What does humility have to do with power? What does humility have to do with accomplishment?

Paul would respond that humility has everything to do with strength, power, and accomplishment; that is, if properly understood. To understand we have but to turn to the premier model of humility, Jesus the Christ. It may sound crazy, Paul says in so many words, but in humility lies true power; in an empty heart can be found profound fullness. It's baffling for us as well, but we've seen it at work. We have seen it at work in the life of Jesus, and many of us have seen it at work in the lives of saints who have influenced our lives in significant ways.

Nevertheless we have to ask; how could this be? How could emptiness be full? How could humility be strength? Just think of the example of Jesus. This is the ultimate act of humility. This is the second person of the God-head; the Christ; true God of true God... who gave up all and became human. The Christ set aside all thought of himself; all self-regard, all self-concern, and in a truly humbling process became human. The Greek word Paul uses in this passage is kenosis, which means to empty. The Christ emptied himself of all things divine and took the form of a servant. The paradox of this process lies in the fact that in the act of emptying himself the Christ – known to us as Jesus of Nazareth – grew more powerful. The less he thought of himself the more powerful he became. The more he reached out to others, putting aside his self-regard, the more powerful he became until in humility he conquered death completely.

Jesus was a model of humility... not a model of passiveness or quietude, but of a humble assertiveness for others in which lies the power of Life and Love itself. This is the model that

Paul holds out to us. This is the kind of humility with which we should approach All Saints; giving thanks to God for those who have been a part of our lives. They knew something of this humility, the saints who have touched us. Not perfectly, to be sure, but they knew something of this humility, because they managed time and again to abandon their self-regard and reach out to us. They gave us life; they shared with us the values and qualities of life necessary to live a meaningful, spiritual life. And that which they gave us lives on and on. Perhaps that's the lesson we should take from our All Saints celebration; a simple yet profound truth illustrated again and again in the life of Jesus and the lives of the saints. That which we do for ourselves dies with us; but that which we do for others lives on and on and on...