

September 25, 2011

Philippians 2:1-13

There is a website called www.theworkofthepeople.com

It has a variety of powerful, short videos intended to be used in some really creative ways. What I love about them is that they're fresh and offbeat and creative and poignant.

The reason I bring this up in the context of my sermon is that many of the film shorts contain elements of street theater. It's the kind of thing that involves the audience, and what makes these short films so wonderful is the degree to which people actually engage or do not engage in the "theater" that is occurring in the film.

One example is a film that shows a young man with a cardboard sign that reads in bold black marker, "Foot Washing". He walks around in some downtown area holding the sign over his head and basically tries to get people to allow him to wash their feet.

There follows a series of very interesting interactions with this man. Everything from avoiding eye contact with the strange guy with the sign to enthusiastic participation and tearful hugs after the foot washing...and, as you can imagine, everything in between.

Street theater engages the audience. There is no simple line between the actors and the audience. Even if a member of the "audience" refuses to participate, they still become a part of the play in their refusal. And this is where we see a connection to St. Paul's letter to the Philippians.

In our lesson today, the apostle Paul quotes a hymn of the ancient church that gives us a glimpse of the theology of those first generations of Christians. Paul says that Jesus did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped or exploited. In other words, the ancient church believed that Jesus was fully human and fully divine, and that he suffered no loss of self even though he was, as this hymn puts it: "found in the form of a human being".

I look at this very much like an actor who does street theater, engaging the audience as a part of the play. The Incarnation, the act of *God* entering creation, is this same kind of event. Jesus became human – truly human, not God somehow pretending to be human, or *acting* like a human. Jesus... became... human in order to show *us* how to be more genuinely human. He invited us to imitate him. To put it in the context of interactive street theater, Jesus entered creation to engage us in the divine street theater that is our life. Christ continues to enter our lives daily through our interactions with each other and the world around us. Engaging with God can be either our acceptance of the grace and

love that God offers, or our refusal of God's hand in our lives. Notice: the play unfolds regardless.

The life of faith, then, is one that is not observed, like one might watch a TV show or a film. It's not far off and distant waiting for some hereafter either. It is not a product to be consumed, it is our life lived, right now. Christ has invaded our reality, he has entered into the flesh and blood of everyday living. This belief that God entered creation on our level and continues to sanctify life through acting in our lives, is a central part of our faith identity. Salvation isn't what happens at the end. Salvation is happening *now*, all around us. It's a process that engages us through the course of our lives that involves every aspect of our being.

So when Paul encourages us at the end of this lesson to work out our own salvation, we are not to think of it as some highly personalized transaction between God and me, and if I do everything right, then I get harps and angels after I die. That's fine... but that's not what Paul was talking about. Salvation is a process, a call, to work the fields where we are right now. This life matters and not just as a preparation for the next. It is where salvation begins, in the imitation of Christ living as a faithful human. It is played out in the actions and interactions with our neighbors, who create with us the theater in the streets of our daily living.

The life of faith is one of participation: participation with our world... with other people... and participation with God. God has chosen to act with us in a free form play where we are co-determiners, co-creators of what might happen. God's not *watching* this play of life and judging our performance – God's *in* the play with us. We are working out our salvation.....together.

Now you can try and avoid eye contact and studiously avoid the play, but all you're really doing is choosing to be a bit player. Salvation is happening all around you. Step out into the street and work out your salvation in the context of the theater where you live and breathe ...take it in, ham it up, whatever you do, do it with vigor and know that it makes a difference. Amen.