

# Palm Sunday

## COACHING WITH UNDERSTANDING

*Philippians 2:5-11*

*Palm Sunday*

Analysis by Ben Williams

*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.*

**Author's Note:** Reading Paul's letters gives us little glimpses

into the ancient world. Each community Paul wrote faced particular issues that Paul specifically addressed. I like to think of Paul as a coach for these communities: giving guidance or admonishment when necessary. In this passage from the letter to the Philippians, Paul gives one clear directive to the community: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus..." It may be tempting to turn Christ's actions of self-emptying into our own call to action; but, the focus of the Christ hymn is to draw our attention to what Jesus does. Our call from Coach Paul, then, is to reflect on Christ's work and how we might live into that work by rejecting exploitative power.



Entry of Christ into Jerusalem (1320) by Pietro Lorenzetti-  
Source, Public Domain,  
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=3944840>

*Jesus embraces the vulnerability of being human for us; a divine act only God could accomplish.*

## **DIAGNOSIS: SOMETHING TO BE EXPLOITED**

### ***Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Coaching Athletes***

“Winning isn’t everything. It’s the only thing. If you can shrug off a loss, you can never be a winner.” This quote from Coach

Vince Lombardi is emblematic of the challenge coaches face when success is the priority of coaching. It can easily reduce athletes to the total sum of the outcomes of their endeavors. If a player isn't producing to the level expected, then the player's value is diminished.

Of course, we can rationalize this at the professional sporting level. But it is not just coaches who face this challenge. Parents living vicariously through their children's success face this temptation. Employers or managers might feel pressure to view their workers as numbers on a spreadsheet. The value of employees, children, friends, athletes or any other human relationship can be reduced to a performative metric of our own device.

### ***Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): A Call to Succeed***

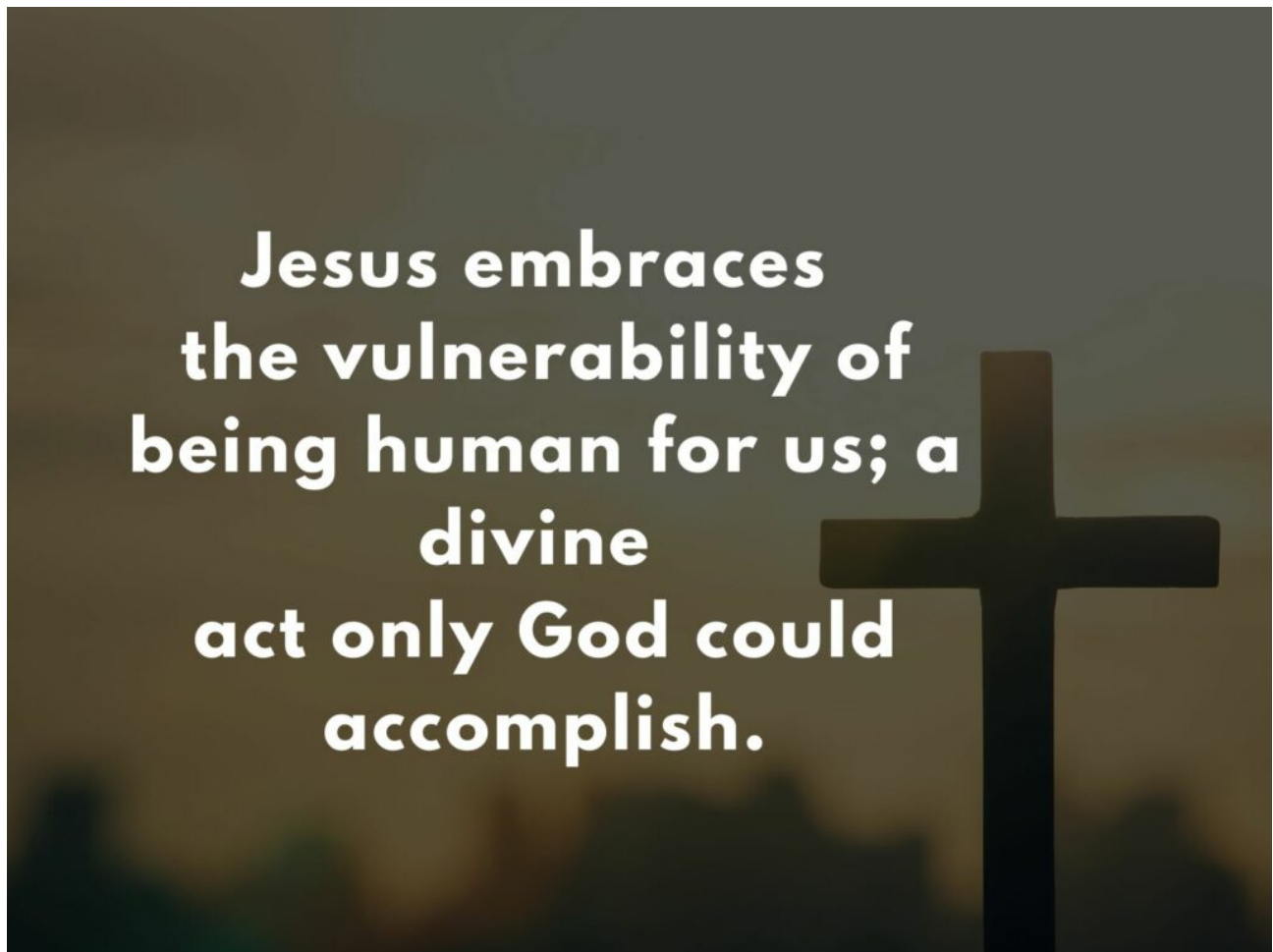
In turn, we are weighed down by pressure to perform. We become convinced that success is a measure of godliness. Those who are successful are elevated to the divine realms and idolized. Athletic prowess is considered super-human at the upper-levels of one's sport. Parents beam with pride when their child accomplishes a feat the parent could not. Fattened wallets become the only evidence to judge a business as good. Regardless of the cost, harm, or impact we buy the idea that it's okay to leverage power if it leads to success.

### ***Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Left Exploited***

Exploitation lurks just around the corner when success is the only valued measurement of worth. Why? Because unfounded power that claims its own divinity always wields that power to protect itself. And Jesus, "though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited..." So, Jesus refuses and rejects the use of exploitative power. We find ourselves chasing our own exploitation when we deny our humanity.



by claiming our own divinity; or worse, entrusting such divinity to another.



Divine Act (from Canva)

## **PROGNOSIS: HIGHLY EXALTED**

### ***Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Found Exalted***

And yet, Christ “emptied himself” of the divinity to which he rightly held claim. “And, being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.” Jesus embraces the vulnerability of being human for us; a divine act only God could accomplish. And he is found to be highly exalted, given a name above all names, so that all may know where true divinity lies.

### ***Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): A Call to Be***

This act frees us from our obsessive need to secure for ourselves the so-called success that proved our worth. Rather, we live into a call to be exactly who we are created to be: human beings who falter and persist: parents who love their children for who they are, employers who value their employees and not just their labor. Regardless of profit, benefit, or success, the Holy Spirit opens our hearts to reflect God's compassionate love for all that God created, including ourselves.

### ***Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Coaching Human Beings***

"For me, success is not about the wins and losses. It's about helping these young fellas be the best versions of themselves on and off the field." This quote from fictional Coach Ted Lasso is emblematic of the potential coaches have to make a positive impact in their players' lives. It can easily make a profound difference in a player's life to be seen as more than just an athlete. If a coach coaches with understanding, then the players full potential is realized.

Of course, its not just coaches who make this life-changing impact. We all have the capacity, because of God's gracious love, to see one another as more than the sum total of our actions. We all can approach one another with understanding that we are human beings—beloved by God—first and anything else second. "Let the same mind be in you as in Christ Jesus," Paul writes. May it be so.

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# Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

## A Pharisee, Jesus, and a Tax Collector Walk into a Bar

Luke 18:9-14

20th Sunday after Pentecost

Analysis by Glenn L. Monson

*9 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' 13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' 14 I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other, for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted."*



James Tissot (French, 1836-1902). The Pharisee and the Publican (Le pharisien et le publicain), 1886-1894, cropped. Opaque watercolor over graphite on gray wove paper, Image: 9 7/8 x 6 1/2 in. (25.1 x 16.5 cm). Brooklyn Museum, Purchased by public subscription, 00.159.178 (Photo: Brooklyn Museum, 00.159.178\_PS2.jpg)

*Our expectations, our stereotypes, and all our notions of “who*



*deserves what” are thrown in the trash bin. Sinners are justified! Now, it is Christ who has the last laugh, even over death and the devil.*

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## **DIAGNOSIS: The Set-up**

### ***Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): We’ve Heard This One Before***

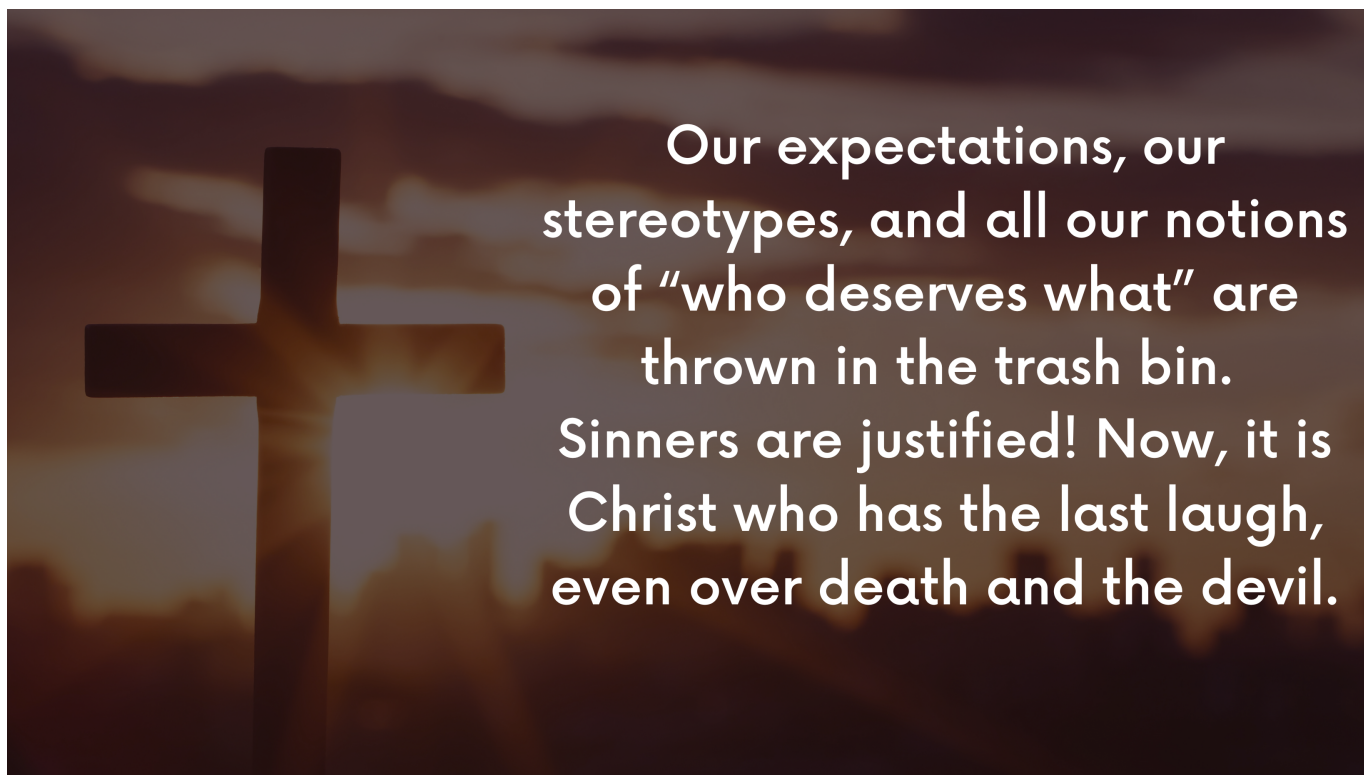
We have all heard the opening line, “A preacher, a priest, and a rabbi walk into a bar.” When we hear this we know that we are dealing with stereotypes – all purportedly righteous sorts – and we are being set up. So here, “A Pharisee and a tax collector enter the temple to pray.” We know immediately that we are dealing with a righteous person and an unrighteous person. We know who is who. At least we think we do.

### ***Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Taking it Hook, Line, and Sinker***

Sure enough, the characters perform as expected: The Pharisee announces his righteousness and the tax collector stands far off, beating his breast, crying for mercy. We think, “Just as we thought. The sinner is in his rightful place, and the righteous one is in his. What could be more fitting?” Nothing to look at here.

### ***Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Punch Line!***

“I tell you [the sinner] went home justified, rather than [the righteous one].” Wow! We didn’t see that coming. All this time we had been believing that thieves and rogues, adulterers and other sinners were beyond grace, when, in fact, it is the self-righteous that stand distant from grace. What a punch line! What a reversal! What an end to our self-righteousness!



Our expectations, our stereotypes, and all our notions of “who deserves what” are thrown in the trash bin. Sinners are justified! Now, it is Christ who has the last laugh, even over death and the devil.

Sinners are justified (from Canva)

## **PROGNOSIS: The Punch Line**

### ***Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Christ Has the Last Laugh***

The One who humbled himself, “and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross,” is the One who is exalted, leading the way to the exaltation of all those who humble themselves before this Lord. Our expectations, our stereotypes, and all our notions of “who deserves what” are thrown in the trash bin. Sinners are justified! Now, it is Christ who has the last laugh, even over death and the devil.

### ***Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): We’ve Been Taken in by Christ***

Our expectations have been reversed. We no longer trust in our own righteousness – our tithing, our fasting, our piety, our ability to live up to ‘righteous’ expectations – but we trust in the Merciful One, who alone saves. We are continually surprised

by the grace extended even to us.

***Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): We Love Telling This Story***

We tell this hilarious story wherever we go: “A thief, a rogue, an adulterer, and a tax collector went before the bar of the Almighty.” What happened? They were justified by grace, by the Merciful One who always has the last laugh. Alleluia! The heavens shake with the laughter of God.