

“The Paráboláni”

(Phil. 2:25-30)

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Chapel Pointe
September 21, 2008

I. Introduction

A. Have you ever wanted to be a Paráboláni?

1. Who they were

Accordingly, in the early church there were societies of men and women who called themselves *the paráboláni*, that is, *the riskers or gamblers*. They ministered to the sick and imprisoned, and they saw to it that, if at all possible, martyrs and sometimes even enemies would receive an honorable burial. Thus in the city of Carthage during the great pestilence of A.D. 252, Cyprian, the bishop, showed remarkable courage. In self-sacrificing fidelity to his flock, and love even for his enemies, he took upon himself the care of the sick, and bade his congregation nurse them and bury the dead. What a contrast with the practice of the heathen who were throwing the corpses out of the plague-stricken city and were running away in terror!

B. Mother Teresa was a “paráboláni”

She stood 4’11” tall and did much of her best work in her late 80’s

She was born just north of Greece. Her peasant father died when she was seven years old. She was taken regularly to church, where she met Jesus Christ. As a teenager she felt a calling to go into full-time church work, and she became a Catholic sister. One day a missionary spoke to her home congregation about the great need to bring Christ to the people in India, so Teresa volunteered and was accepted for a teaching post in Calcutta.

At the convent in Calcutta, Teresa enjoyed very lovely quarters. She had beautiful accommodations that were surrounded by lovely gardens. She did her teaching in a very lovely and attractive classroom.

But one day she had to make a trip to the dirtiest part of the town. When she walked the streets alone, through the back parts of Calcutta, she saw something she had never seen before. She saw human beings dying and nobody was paying any attention to them. When she inquired, she found that this was very common. Nobody had time for the dying; there was no place for them to go. The young nun was haunted by this terrible situation. She felt that Jesus Christ was saying to her, ***“I am going to call you to serve the poorest of the poor. I am calling you to minister not to the living, but to the dying.”***

This was such a strong call that she asked the church to release her from her vows. It took two years, but finally she was released. No longer a nun, she was sent out of the convent and into the streets of Calcutta. With only a few rupees in her pocket, she shuffled down the streets with no promise of a meal and no promise of clothing from the church. She was on her own, and she prayed, ***“Jesus, lead me to somebody who is dying all alone.”***

Two blocks away she saw an old lady lying in the gutter on the main street. The living body was being eaten by the rats that were running in the gutter. She was too weak to struggle as rats and mice gnawed at her face. Teresa picked up the woman and literally dragged her to the nearest hospital. She was refused admittance. “But,” she exclaimed, “this woman is dying.” She was told, “People die in the streets of Calcutta all the time. We cannot take her.” Teresa refused to leave until they had taken the dying woman. She said, ***“If there is a God in heaven, and a Christ we love, nobody should die alone.”***

Shortly thereafter Teresa went to the city government and asked for an empty room... “a place where I can build a home for the dying.” The civil authorities told her, “Well, we have this empty Hindu temple of Kali, if that would suit you.” She said, “Beautiful. It would be beautiful for God. That is all I want to do in my life...something beautiful for God.”

Two other sisters heard about Teresa’s project, and they helped to drag the dying from the streets into this Hindu temple. Without medicine, without money, without an organization, without any backing, they did what they could, and nobody died in their place without at least a touch on the cheek and a kind word: “We love.” “Go in peace with God.” They did not die alone.

The Pope was so impressed with her ministry that during his visit, he gave her his own private white limousine. She took one look at this big, expensive car and said, “Oh, thank you.” As soon as the Pope left, she raffled off the limo. The money went for her house for the dying.

Today, she has over 10,000 dying lepers in her colony. Her colonies have spread into 28 cities. She and all of those who are members of the Missionaries of Charity have taken the vow of total poverty. The only thing they may own is the cheapest cotton garment that only the poorest women wore and a pair of sandals.

Malcolm Muggeridge, who interviewed Mother Teresa on the British Broadcasting Company and later visited her in Calcutta, said, “The thing I noticed about you and the hundreds of sisters who now form your team is that you all look so happy. Is it a put-on?” She said, ***“Oh no, not at all. Nothing makes you happier than when you really reach out in mercy to someone who is badly hurt.”***

C. Today we meet Epaphroditus

1. Actually called a “paráboláni” in Philippians 2
2. ***“Not regarding his own life”*** in v.27 (NKJV)
 - a. Risked his life for others

- b. To the point of near death

D. The “Big Three” in Ephesians 2

1. Paul
2. Timothy
3. Epaphroditus
 - a. Lots of parents name their sons “Paul” or “Timothy”
 1. But I’ve never met a kid named Epaphroditus
 - b. This is the only place he’s mentioned in the Bible
 1. He represents the ordinary people of the church
 2. Doing their ministry without fanfare
 - c. Yet God said to accord such people with great honor
 1. After describing his ministry, Paul said to

“hold people like him in high esteem”
 2. Why????
 - d. Let’s meet this remarkable man

II. Text (Phil. 2:25-30)

A. Background

(25) But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. (26) For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. (27) Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow.

1. “Epaphroditus” comes from “Aphroditus”
 - a. The Greek goddess of love
 1. Literally....“The favorite of Aphroditus”

2. He apparently came from a pagan family
 - b. A girl's name
 1. Like "a boy named Sue"
 2. Why none of you have named your sons that
2. The church in Philippi sent him to assist Paul in Rome
 - a. They had him deliver some money to Paul
 - b. ...and Epaphroditus nearly died helping Paul

B. What we know about Epaphroditus

1. He was an ordinary guy

- a. Compared to Paul & Timothy
- b. An ordinary guy who used what he had
- c. Worked behind the scenes

2. He was trustworthy

- a. Sent money with him for Paul and the churches

3. He had a servant's heart

(25) But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs.

- a. Went to assist Paul
- b. Packed up and left
- c. Put his personal matters aside
- b. "***My brother***"
 1. Like a brother to Paul
 2. Not "a" brother....but "my" brother

4. He was a hard worker

- a. ***“My fellow worker” (v.25)***
 - 1. Work draws people closer
 - 2. Wanted to help
 - a. To share the load
 - 3. Worked to the point of near death
- b. When we “moved the church” last year
 - 1. Watching people work together
 - 2. Sense of accomplishment
 - 3. Look what we did as a team

5. He wasn't afraid to fight for the faith

- a. ***“My fellow soldier”***
 - 1. Greatest friends made during combat
 - a. John McCain as a POW
 - 2. Must rely on others
 - a. Two guys who kept him alive
 - 3. Epaphroditus was ready and willing to fight
- b. Roman legions

Shoulder-to-shoulder fighting accounted for the success of Rome's armies. Prior to the triumph of Rome, men fought mostly as individuals. They often dressed alike and were armed alike, but they did not fight side-by-side with each other. The Roman armies did, and as a result the phalanxes of the legions were the terror of the ancient world. The soldiers marched abreast behind a solid wall of shields. And as they marched they struck their shields with their spears in unison and sang their battle songs. In such a way we are to advance in harmony against the spiritual powers arrayed against us.

- c. We are at war with the enemy

1. They hated Jesus and will hate us

6. *He delivered the message*

a. *“messenger”*

1. When sending an important message
 - a. General to troops
 - b. Trusted man
 - c. One who will get through
2. Won't distort the message
 - a. Will properly represent you

b. You are a “messenger”

1. Word used is “apostolos”
2. An apostle must deliver the message

7. *He was a care giver*

a. *“whom you sent to take care of my needs”*

1. NKJV “the one who ministered to my needs”
2. He “ministered” personally to Paul

b. Greek word *“leitourgos”* (li toorg os')

The word he uses for “*to take care of*” is “*leitourgos*.” In secular Greek this was a magnificent word. In the ancient days in the Greek cities there were men who, because they loved their city so much, at their own expense undertook certain great civic duties. It might be to defray the expenses of an embassy, or the cost of putting on one of the dramas of the great poets, or of training the athletes who would represent the city in the games, or of fitting out a warship and paying a crew to serve in the navy of the state. These men were the supreme benefactors of the state and they were known as *leitourgoi*.

c. “Caregivers” in Chapel Pointe

*Is God calling you?

8. *He cared about the feelings of others*

(26) *For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill.*

- a. He was concerned—because they were concerned—for him
- b. He had become sick
 - 1. ***“Indeed he was ill, and almost died”***
 - a. For the work of Christ
 - 2. Literally
 - a. “He was ill, willing to risk death”
 - b. “paráboláni”....not regarding his own life
- c. Note the physical suffering of these three—
 - 1. Paul—three times prayed for deliverance physically
 - 2. Timothy—Needed some wine for his stomach
 - 3. Epaphroditus—near death
- d. What we can learn from physical suffering
 - 1. People from our church

9. *He was an encouragement to those who knew him*

(27) *Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow.*

- a. How your suffering will encourage others
 - 1. Example from people I know
- b. ***“But God had mercy on him”***.....v.27
 - 1. Why God preserved him
 - a. Mercy
 - 2. (Paul said) “But God had mercy on me also”

- a. Paul loved him
- b. Paul needed him
- c. Willing to die for the cause
- d. Did it joyfully.....v.28

(28) Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety.

- e. Key is burden for others
 - 1. They cared for each other
 - 2. Willing to risk all for others
 - a. “A *paraboláni*”
 - b. Are you?

10. We are to honor people like him

(29) Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, (30) because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.

- a. Risked life for cause of Christ
 - 1. *paraboláni*”
 - 2. To reach others
 - 3. To help Paul
- b. To do what the church wanted done
 - 1. And couldn’t do personally
 - 2. He went to the battlefield for them
- c. He worked behind the scenes
- d. Volunteers who do the work in Chapel Pointe
 - 1. Whatever needs to be done

- 2. Work to point of exhaustion
- 3. Do it without public acclaim
- d. Churches that try to “hire” all of their help
 - 1. The proliferation of paid staff
 - 2. Deprive the people of the church
 - a. The joy of serving
 - b. The need for commitment
- e. The key is ordinary people like Epaphroditus...like you
 - 1. Are you willing to risk it all
 - a. Be a gambler
 - b. To add some fear into your life
 - c. Christian service involves sacrifice!

IV. Summary

A. Hold such men and women in high esteem...

- 1. God certainly does
- 2. Some final words from Mother Teresa
 - a. As she lay dying..... *“Jesus, I love you. Jesus, I love you”*
 - b. *“The other day I dreamed that I was at the gates of heaven. And St. Peter said, ‘Go back to Earth, there are no slums up here,’”*
 - c. *“We are called upon not to be successful, but to be faithful.”*
 - d. *“If luxury creeps in, we lose the spirit of the order. To be able to love the poor and know the poor we must be poor ourselves.”*