

***We gather around the table to honor the richness of God's creation
at Winchester and Hamilton***

[Philippians 2:1-11](#)

If you've done much Bible Study, you probably already know that the letters of Paul, like much of the rest of the Bible, were written at a time when not many people knew how to read. The literacy rate at the time Paul and Jesus lived, historians say, was only about 5-10%. Paul knew when he wrote his letters that more than 90% of the people he was writing to weren't going to sit down and read it silently. They were going to *hear* it—maybe during one of their regular gatherings. Maybe as the letter got passed around the community, held for a few minutes by the one person in the room who could read it aloud to everyone else.

That's true of all of Paul's letters, but the chapter that we read this morning is different—because this chapter has embedded in it a *song*. A hymn, actually—a hymn that we know the early Christian Church—maybe the Philippians themselves—sang often. Maybe even every week, because I can't imagine there were many hymns in circulation at that time. This hymn has a name—the *Kenosis Hymn*, it's called in Greek. *Kenosis*, which means “self-emptying”. And that's what this hymn's words are about. Self-emptying. About Jesus choosing to empty himself—give away his God-ness. He knelt down as if he were a slave, the song says; he came into this world poor, even ready to die, so that he could be part of God's plan to save the world. To save us.

*“Though he was in the form of God...he emptied himself
by taking the form of a slave and by becoming like human beings.”*

Have you ever tried to *say* the words to a song you've only *sung* before? It's hard to do.

A-ma-zeeeng grace, how sweet the sound... My voice keeps darting into other notes, even when I'm trying to keep it in in one place!

So I wonder if when the Philippian reader got to this place in Paul's letter, he or she broke into song when he got to those familiar words.

*He humbled himself...
Therefore, God highly honored him
and gave him a name above all names,
so that at the name of Jesus everyone
in heaven, on earth, and under the earth might bow...*

He humbled himself. Humility. That's what Paul wanted these church people to hear. Humble yourself in love for each other in the same way Jesus humbled himself to come to you. Don't just sing those words, Paul was saying to them. *Live them*.

It's a lot easier just to sing. For them. For us.

Campbell and New Creation are not the first churches to share facilities. In the California-Nevada Conference there are quite a few churches that have done it, are doing it. Most often, these arrangements are newer, ethnically-based congregations that come in to fill space that a historic, European-American congregation is no longer using fully. And if you look for success stories about these arrangements, you will find: hardly any. Very few. In fact, the track record of shared facilities arrangements between churches is a record mostly of conflict. Sometimes over big, theological issues, but more often about things like who leaves food in the refrigerator, or who eats it. Whose children left that mark on the wall, or that big spot on the carpeting. Whether it's fair for one congregation's ministries to use so much electricity, when its name is not on the PG&E bill. An unwillingness of one congregation to shift its schedule a little, to make room for the other's event. It's funny how much meaning can be read into those little things: disrespect, rudeness, cultural differences too wide to cross.

This shouldn't surprise us. Sharing is hard. Think about how Americans have historically acquired property. The West was settled through homesteading. Homesteaders possessed the land, built fences, and announced their ownership. The word that describes land under this system was "mine". Once you own land in this society, it's not only the place you occupy; it's your wealth, often your biggest, most valuable asset. This is as true of church buildings as it is of individual homes.

It can feel like loss—unfair—to live with a roommate who just moved in recently and shares only some of the expenses.

But here's the thing. We belong to a God who, when he created the earth and everything in it, simply *gave* it to us. We are followers of a Christ—a Messiah—who *emptied* himself. We may have this property to hold and to care for right now, but make no mistake. Unlike our homes, this property is meant not for our comfort, but for the purposes of God: justice, compassion, a place of welcome and service to all.

And look at what can happen when we do that together:

Every week, between our two congregations, we worship God in three languages—four, when we 'Tel Papa God Tenki' in Krio.

Every week we send readers to Rosemary School *and* we offer the families in our neighborhood evening tutoring, sports, Spanish language Bible Study; even a workshop on handling finances.

Every week we offer Christian community and education to more than a hundred children and youth.

We sent mission teams this summer to a Native American reservation *and* to Cuba.

We offered Vacation Bible School during the day *and* in the evenings.

We help each other. Many times this year, volunteers from both congregations worked together to maintain this campus; we set up or cleaned up after each other's events, as acts of friendship and mutual responsibility.

We learn from each other. Every week I watch—with admiration—the ways New Creation lives its faith, differently than the ways we practice faith at Campbell.

The ministries that come out of this campus are bigger and more inclusive than either church could manage on its own.

It takes some humility to let your things, your property, be used for ministry that might not have your church's name on it. Maybe a lot of humility. It takes *emptying yourself*—of pride, of ownership, of thinking your way is the only way.

He emptied himself for our sake.

That's who we come from. It's who we are.