

Dear People of University Lutheran Church,

Have I told you about my two cats, Pepper and Piper? Perhaps I have mentioned them a time or two in sermons or other writings! Well, yesterday, I heard my wife, Margo, who was giving the aforementioned cats their treats, say, "Pepper, ladies first." In other words, she was telling Pepper, the bigger male cat, that his sister, Piper, half his size, got her treats first. So, I blurted out from the next room, "Does that actually work?" Margo said, "Yes, Pepper knows that his sister gets her treats before he does. Ladies first!" Well, if that is true, Margo has accomplished something close to a miracle.

Why do I say this? Well, just the night before, I was in the basement and Piper was eating. Pepper came down and selfishly moved her aside, so he could eat. What is it about the male of a species that makes him think he is more important? Guys? Any comments? And, last night, Piper, the female cat, was laying on top of our cat tree. Pepper jumped up with her, and he again moved her aside. She jumped down, and he claimed the highest and best spot in the living room. So, if when it comes to treats, Margo has taught Pepper some manners, well, that is truly amazing.

This probably has nothing to do with cats, but the Apostle Paul said to people in Philippians 2:3-4, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others." Is this not what Margo has been trying to teach our dear Pepper? That when it comes to treats, he is not be selfish. He is not to put his own interests first. Instead, he is to humbly put Piper's interests first, and let her eat her treats before he gets his. In other words, Pepper is to be generous and kind to Piper.

During this time of the coronavirus pandemic, we might find ourselves being a little selfish, and putting the needs of ourselves and our families first. For example, I am thinking about the oversupplying of toilet paper and other household items at the expense of others. Besides toilet paper, I have heard flour is also scarce in some towns because it has been bought out. Well, the Apostle Paul calls people to a different sort of living. In fact, he calls us to look into our cupboards and see if we have something that we can out of the kindness and the generosity of our hearts, share with a needy neighbor.

Then, the Apostle Paul says something truly important to us about Jesus in Philippians 2:5-8, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross." Of course, the point here is that Jesus put our interests before himself when he suffered and died on the cross to save us from sin, evil and death.

Even now, Jesus continues to put our interests before himself by not forsaking us during this pandemic. Instead, he comes again and again to help and save us. So, perhaps we might follow his example, even while we are isolating ourselves in our homes. Perhaps we too can empty ourselves if only momentarily and put another person's interests before our own. How about making a phone call or sending a card to someone elderly, to someone alone, or to someone we know is struggling through this time. Certainly, if Pepper can be taught to put Piper's interests before his, we can do this for each other.

You are in my prayers,
Pastor Tom