

Undercover Boss; Philippians 2:4-11

As this is Labor Day Weekend, we turn our thoughts to workers in America and the work place in general. We think of the ways in which we labor and we give thanks for all of the workers, paid and unpaid, who make our lives better. This morning, we will turn to a scripture passage from Philippians 2:4-11, which describes how God came to us in human form so many years ago.

Read Philippians 2:4-11. Pray.

There's a goofy show on television called "Undercover Boss," I'm sure some of you have seen it. A few months ago, Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto was on it and went undercover among the city workers in Pittsburgh; it caused quite a stir. The premise of the show is this: The CEO of a company goes undercover among the workers to see what working life is really like for the common person. The boss does this to learn to identify with the workers, to experience the working conditions first hand, and to reward the workers who are putting in their best efforts for the company. I watched an episode recently about the female CEO of the Great Wolf Lodge water park chain. I'm sure those of you with kids or grandkids know all about Great Wolf Lodge. The closest one, I think, is in Sandusky Ohio and consist of a large hotel attached to an indoor water park. There are huge water slides, shallow kiddie pools, and a giant bucket hanging from the ceiling (a really giant bucket.) The bucket gradually fills up with water and when the water gets to the top, a bell rings letting you know that the bucket is slowly turning over and thousands of gallons of water are about to dump right on your head if you are standing under the bucket! It's quite an experience!

The CEO of Great Wolf Lodge is a woman named Kim Shaffer. So, on this episode of Undercover Boss, Kim changed out of her fancy boss suit, changed her hair, and went around to different locations and worked alongside of the workers. She worked in a childcare area of a park, she worked with a lifeguard at one of the parks, she worked as a waitress in one of the restaurants, and she worked at the front desk of a Great Wolf Lodge checking in the guests. Performing all of these jobs helped her to see the issues that her workers face every day and the areas in which the Great Wolf Lodge could use improvements. At the end of the episode, Kim met with the employees she worked with and she told them what a

wonderful job they were doing and she gave them each a reward for their dedication and hard work; sometimes the reward was a promotion, sometimes the reward was money; sometimes it was help achieving a goal that they had. Kim was never the same boss after this experience.

Would your boss agree to do something like this? Would your boss humble him or herself and take the form of a common worker? Would your boss give up the power suit or the corner office or the 3 martini lunch and look the workers right in the eye and ask them how they are doing?

Or maybe, you are the boss, and so then the question would be, are you willing to put yourself in the place of your workers and see what everyday life is like for them? Maybe years ago you were one of the common workers and you worked your way up the ladder; would you be willing to become a common worker once again, one who comes out of the office and deals with the public every day? It's interesting to think about.

When they first put this show on television, they marketed it as something new - a new idea in reality television. *Something that had never been seen before.* But whenever I see this show, or even an advertisement for it, I don't think of it as new at all. I think of the Bible, particularly the New Testament, and I think of the most famous Undercover Boss who ever existed. The one who really invented the idea of coming from a high position and mingling with the common folk. I'll show you what I mean.

In the Old Testament, God was revealed in many ways. He was revealed when He chose to interact with people in what theologians call "theophanies." Moses had a theophany when he heard God speaking to him out of the burning bush in Exodus 3:2. It says, "The angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in a flame of fire out of a bush; Moses looked and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed." And when Moses was leading the Israelites out of Egypt heading into the Promised Land, God led them through the wilderness as fire and as a pillar of smoke, a really tall pillar of smoke that reached up to the sky. Exodus 13:21 says, "The Lord went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night."

And in the life of the prophet Elijah, God came to Eljah in many ways, the most famous of which was an encounter on Mt. Horeb in a cave on the side of the mountain. In this theophany in 1 Kings 19, we see poor Elijah shaking in his shoes because God starts by sending a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks into pieces. Then, while Elijah was waiting, God sent an earthquake and then he sent a fire. But after all of that cacophony, after that giant drum roll if you will, God finally spoke to Elijah in the silence. So, the experience of folks in the Old Testament was to see God in these great and miraculous ways-fire, smoke, earthquakes, and a great wind. Boy, you can't miss it when God comes knocking at your door!

And when the Old Testament folks thought about the coming of the messiah who would save them, they thought of imagery like a conquering hero riding in on a horse or a time when wine would flow freely throughout the land and prosperity would reign for Israel. This is what they thought was going to happen. But little did anyone know, when God truly decided to come to earth and show himself, he came as the Undercover Boss.

I know it's not December, it's quite hot outside and it's certainly not snowing, but let's pretend it's Christmas and let's think about how God actually came into this world. I like to call it the very first episode of Undercover Boss. Our scripture verse for today from Philippians 2 gives us some guidance as it tells us that "Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God . . . 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." When God came to earth, God came not as a conquering hero, but as little tiny baby. He emptied himself, he stripped himself of all of the fancy stuff that makes him God, like wings or firey hair or a big throne, however you like to picture God in your head. The book of Revelation shows us God sitting on a fantastic throne with colors all around him and strange looking creatures and angels flying around the throne and everybody is singing. But none of that came with him when he was born of a virgin. None of it. God gave up the fancy power suit and the big corner office, to be born in human likeness, to be just like us. He was born a helpless baby, he walked around in sandals and he got his feet dirty. He ate and he drank and he slept. He loved and he lost and he cried. And he certainly wasn't

born into wealth, for Mary and Joseph were just a common couple, with Joseph being a carpenter, not a Wall Street executive. Jesus lived a simple life from beginning to end, and he spent his ministry looking into the eyes of the common people, eating with them, drinking with them, crying with them, and asking them, “Hey, how are you doing?”

That’s how God conducted himself as the Undercover Boss. God, the creator of the universe, came here to live as a common human being. That’s the original episode of Undercover Boss.

And at the end of an episode of Undercover Boss, there’s always a big reveal – when the workers see that this was actually the CEP who was working with them and eating lunch from a paper bag. For Jesus, when it came time for the big reveal, boy the people were shocked, weren’t they? Most folks thought he was a failure, being obedient even to the point of death, death on a cross. What a loser, they thought! What a miscreant! He got the death he deserves! But weren’t they all shocked when it came time for the big reveal? For this Undercover Boss revealed himself when he came out of the tomb, the biggest reveal of all time! He wasn’t just a commoner – he was the king of kings, the Lord of Lords. He was God himself. And what he brought for those who gave their heart to him was better than a promotion or a gift of cash or brand new car. He brought everlasting life and the chance to be at peace with God forever.

Jesus was the ultimate Undercover Boss. He originated the idea. He was God made flesh/God incarnate/God with us. Think about it.

So my friends, this Labor Day, think about your earthly boss – is he a friend? Is she fair? Does he treat the workers well? Is she in touch with what is really going on on the front lines? And then remember who our true Boss is, our ultimate Boss, and give thanks. Because no matter who your boss might be in this life, if you simply love your Undercover Boss, He will bring you blessings beyond belief. Praise be to God. Amen.