It can be easy and comforting and awe-inspiring to be on the receiving end of Jesus. “What a friend we have in Jesus…” But with friends like Jesus, dare I say, it certainly can be a game changing world. What I find the hardest thing about following Jesus is following Jesus. We are always told to go and do likewise and that—- THAT is a tricky one that Paul puts some light on for us in this week’s New Testament passage.

I can feel Jesus stretching all in me.

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I shared the following story with the vestry. Coming home from DC one time on a city bus from SE to Union Station in the late afternoon, a woman started singing this song.

I can feel Jesus stretching all in me.

I can feel Jesus stretching all in me.

You know it’s always a little strange when someone out of the blue sings acapello in public. I never have found the music or lyrics to this song. I don’t need to I guess, clearly the tune has stayed with me. In so many ways the woman’s song echoes Paul. “God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” If that is not Jesus stretching you, not sure what is.

This passage in Phillipians is known as the Christ Hymn. This year it appears more than once in our lectionary, because we always read it at Palm Sunday. In the passage, Paul quotes a hymn—a song that the early Christians would sing. Why would Paul quote a hymn? I suspect the same reason we would quote a hymn or song, like I just did, because it summarizes exactly what he wanted to say.

So in the hymn Paul tells us something essential about Jesus here. And Jesus tells us something essential about God. It is as if we are looking through clear glass. What we see when we see Jesus tells us about God. When we think of God, we usually think of the all glory laud and honor, the omnipotent one, and there is much truth to that, but the on the ground working reality of God is that God gives. God gives in the Old Testament, water— when we are thirsty, when we are complaining. And God just always gives. God gives God’s all. God gives his Son. God gives God’s love. God empties and gives when there seems to be nothing is left. This is the very nature of who God is.

Jesus understood that. Jesus gives. Jesus gives God’s all. Jesus gives himself. Jesus gives God’s love. Jesus empties himself and gives when there seems to be nothing left. God in Jesus, this is the very nature of who God is— the very nature of who Jesus is. Self-emptying.

And then, you know where the next step is… it comes to us. We understand this, even if we don’t like it; even if we are convicted because we don’t do it and we don’t follow Jesus. Still, we are to give. We are to give God’s all. We are to give ourselves. We are to give God’s love. We are to empty ourselves and give when nothing is left. See why I said this is tricky? Following Jesus is only hard when you follow Jesus. This is to be our nature, we are to be self-emptying.

I think Paul understands today’s Gospel to a tee. Jesus in today’s Gospel gives a story, but not one of his normal parables, this is not a metaphor. Jesus present us with a simple thought provoking simple question. Which person does the right thing? Who does the right thing by God’s reckoning…. the person who says he will work and doesn’t or the one who says he won’t and does the work given to that person? Do the work, be self-emptying.

And so this is the simple truth of it, we are not called to be complacent. In many ways, all that God is interested in is how are hearts are stirred to move to complete God’s work. Because it is as Paul said, it is “God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” That work is to happen whether you are happy about it or do it kicking and screaming (although I doubt that manner is preferred).

It brings to mind a phrase from my New Testament professor, when you start really reading the Gospel, Jesus will wreck your world. And so there we have it, Jesus stretching in us, making it hard,… Making it simple, wrecking our world, emptying us of ourselves to make room for God’s love, one call at a time.

I can feel Jesus stretching all in me.