

Called as Partners in Christ's Service: Humility  
Philippians 2: 3-11  
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Our second scripture lesson comes from Paul's letter to the Philippians...probably the warmest of all of Paul's letters ...he had a great relationship with them. So when he talks to them it's not out of an attitude of great criticism but of great fellowship hoping they do so well and will continue to do even better. Listen to Philippians 2: 3-11.....

We were bantering around at staff this week about who got to be proud about being humbled in the sermon on Humility. It was really a lot of fun. But it reminded me of a story of a preacher who went to speak for a charity organization. At the end of his talk the President of the organization came and handed him an envelope with a check. He said "no, I can't take this...use it for something really helpful for your organization." The president said "Well, we do have a special fund." "Oh, what's the fund for?" "It's so we can get a better speaker next year."

Humility comes in a variety of forms, doesn't it? While that hasn't happened to me, exactly, I can count a number of times where I've preached a sermon I thought was very focused but then someone comes to me afterwards and says, "I just love what you said about \_\_\_\_\_", and I think, "I didn't say anything about that!" So it's a humbling thing when the spirit of God is at work.

The passage in Philippians is one of the great passages in the New Testament because it links a characteristic we're invited to show and live in our own lives with the very character of Jesus Christ. And Paul calls us to imitate Jesus. One of the great devotional books of all time is Thomas A Kempis's "The Imitation of Christ". If you've never read it, I comment it to you because A Kempis talks about what it means in our lives not just to be

better but to actually imitate Jesus in all that we do. It's one of the great challenges of the Christian faith for us to actually do that and we can't move beyond that without recognizing that God does, indeed, calls us to that imitation.

The context of this passage is, as I mentioned, a very friendly relationship between Paul and the Philippians. But he challenges them to take a hard look at how they relate to one another. In the passages previous to this, he says "Be of the same mind; do nothing out of selfish ambition; look first to the needs of others." You know, that sounds really great on paper, and it's something to aspire to, but it's really hard to do that, isn't it? It's hard because it's a contrast –first of all to our cultural norms and it's also hard because it's an affront to our sinful nature that we would want to be so much like Jesus.

I've said this many time before, but I'll say it again, I believe, personally, that our behavior and attitudes will only change as our experience with God deepens. As we grow in our regard to God and God's power, we learn to step out in faith in greater and greater ways. And so, just as in the message Martha read, the Greek speaking folks said "Sir, we would like to see Jesus." I hope that is our prayer as well because as we look towards continuing our series on Mission and Serving, we want to connect our Mission with our Faith. So as our character becomes Christ-like, our mission becomes more Christ-like and we're empowered in wonderful and fresh ways.

But becoming humble is a huge leap. It's not a high value in our world: TV humor, with all its put-downs, not much humility there; the rhetoric around this election and all elections with the accusations and the exaggerations; our own tendencies to try and make ourselves look good. Jonathon Sachs, a leading rabbi in England, has called Humility "the orphaned virtue of our age." I think it's a great challenge. And Paul instead says "Let

your mind be the same as in Christ Jesus who didn't count equality with God something to be exploited but he took the form of a servant."

Now just to look at it in hard words, I think our culture says that self-exaltation is the norm; self-promotion is the means; self-gain is the goal. And the biblical word has a great contrast to that. How extensive does Paul intend our humility to be? He says look at Jesus: every advantage Jesus had, every power he could have used for his own gain, every desirable characteristic he could have used to be popular with people he gave up and he used the strength of his personality, the knowledge of being part of the God-head and the power that he possessed for others.

Now frankly it would have been better if Paul had just said "try to be better than the person next to you". And we descend into that oftentimes. But that's not right; it doesn't get us anyplace and certainly doesn't bring us close together. Instead we look to Jesus; how he lived, who he spent his time with; what he valued and how he presented himself as a servant. One of the many blessings of our congregation is that we have a lot of servants here. We have folks who serve amazingly and consistently. And, many of our servants also serve quietly. I'd like to invite Carrol Herber forward to share her testimony.

**(Carrol) : Good Morning. Prayer Shawl is a quiet ministry. We try to touch the hearts of those who are hurting from a health crisis, a loss or personal life event. Our shawls and lap robes go to members of our congregation but also to loved ones who are out of town. Recently we learned that Barry Wenger, our organist and bell choir director, was driving to North Dakota for a few days to help his parents and uncle, who was ill for a few days. We suggested a prayer shawl might give his uncle some comfort. Barry said, "That would be so nice, but he's Lutheran!" Well Barry, we can help Lutherans, too. And we sent him off with a**

**shawl and a prayer from all of us. Our ministry is for anyone who is in need of comfort and a hug wrapped arms of God.**

**I personally received my prayer shawl in 2005 after knee replacement. I thought that I could contribute and I have really enjoyed the warmth of the group as well as the support we share with each other. How many of you in the congregation, or a member of your family, have received one of our items? Raise your hand. That's wonderful! Thank you.**

**The prayer shawl group was started in 2004 when Pat Johnson was spotted knitting at the Hospitality Desk. Herb Smyers, our former business manager, had an idea that he suggested to Pat...how about knitting prayer shawls for people in crisis? And with that, a new ministry was born. We now distribute about 130 items per year. We knit and crochet prayer shawls and lap robes but also hats and scarves for Lake Forest College international students who can't go home during the Holidays. And we also knit baby socks for newborns. Each item receives a special cross and a label that identifies the source. A signed prayer card and pretty ribbon complete the package before we pray for each recipient. If you know of a need, please let one of our church staff know and we'll share our gift with them. The Prayer Shawl ministry provides a unique service with our handmade items. We believe in the humility of the blessing. Life is short and we do not have too much time to gladden the hearts of those who travel with us. So be quick to love and make haste to be kind. We cannot change the loss illness or grief but we can do this. I think our Prayer Shawl ministry gladdens the hearts of many and lets people, Catholics, Jews, atheists and even Lutherans, Barry, know they are not alone as we pray for them and share the warmth of the shawl. Thank you.**

Thank you, Carrol, for your ministry and all those in the prayer shawl ministry. I just love the concept you said: as we serve, we gladden the heart. I believe we gladden the heart of God as we serve as well. I love the quiet prayerful trust that takes the need and contributes what we can do but then places it in the hands of God to carry the load. It's a picture of humble service and we are so grateful for that ministry.

Paul tells us in the passage that the ultimate work of God is to exalt Jesus and as we think about what it means to serve in humility, we remember that we can't exalt Jesus if we're exalting our self. We can't serve out of a position of how great we are. Sherron K. George makes the point in the chapter we're looking at for this week that when we serve, we come with an attitude of humility because we serve and are served and we grow as a result of that.

Friends, this is God's work and it is our work to imitate Christ's humility at every venue of our life and then let God take the results from there. Our lives point others to Jesus when we live in Humility and if we want people to see Jesus, we live in Humility as well. I referred a few minutes ago to A Kempis's book, "The Imitation of Christ"; the first two chapters are entitled "Imitating Christ and Despising all Vanities on Earth"; and then "Having a Humbled Opinion of Self".

Having a humbled opinion of our self doesn't mean debasing our self and saying we're awful, we're not good—that's not what humility is. Humility means to have a level view of who we are. Have an accurate view of who we are, not putting ourselves down but also not raising ourselves up. In Paul's letter to the Romans he writes this, and I believe this really defines it for us. Chapter 12, which is just a great chapter on Transformation. After talking about being transformed by God's mercy, Paul says ""But by the Grace given

to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought but to think with sober judgement each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned”. It is our opportunity, our choice to live with Humility. Not to humble someone else but to humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord that God may lift us up.

Two great benefits come from Humility that I see. First of all, Humility builds bridges and so fosters unity. When we serve we rarely do it by ourselves. Even when we go in teams, such as the wonderful Work Trip or the Prayer Shawl ministry, we have that fellowship with one another but the team also embraces those we are serving and when we do that with Humility, healthy relationships grow and what a wonderful sense of teamwork results. And I believe also that Humility develops joy because the humble person is the person who has room in their lives for God and others.

But how do we become humble? I don't have an easy answer but I will tell you that what I think is the most effective is exactly what Paul says. Look at Jesus Christ—read through the Gospels and see who Jesus hung out with. See how He treated everyone. See what His priorities were. See how He sought to glorify God in the things that He did with other people. The opening quote on your bulletins today is from Dr. George and it says: “Christ calls each of us to examine our attitudes; to search our way of being in Mission. She says I sincerely believe that the key to Mission work today is simply asking God's spirit to progressively transform our attitudes allowing God's grace to flow through the totality of our lives.”

A blogger named Stephanie Garcia writes this: “I don't know about you but I want to be remembered as the kind of person that didn't care if she was better than others but better than who she used to be. If in the end I'm not looked at as one who could be the most blunt, the most successful, or the toughest, I hope to be the one who put her whole heart into things that resulted

in the overwhelming feelings of gratitude. And those feeling of gratitude move with humility throughout our lives”.

And so, friends, the challenge of Scripture and James chapter 4 is to humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord that God may lift us up. Do we want to experience heights in our lives? Then we humble ourselves and we let God lift us up, individually and together.

Please pray with me:

Lord God, we are grateful that you came to us even in your great power, nonetheless in great humility. And we would echo the request of the Greek speakers in Jerusalem: Lord, we would see Jesus. We pray in His name.

Amen.