

Christlike Living
September 27, 2020
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Humility is a funny trait, one that is easier to notice than it often is to show. It can even feel like a bit of a catch 22—if you think to yourself, “I’m being humble right now,” does that in itself mean that you’re exhibiting pride in your humility? In Paul’s letter to the Philippians, the idea of humility would have been even more confusing and challenging than it is today. The question then wasn’t just *how* to be humble. In fact, in Roman times, humility was something to be frowned upon—you should show pride in your work, and only those who weren’t powerful tried to be humble to make up for their lack of societal status. So for Paul to call Christians to be humble, then, and to be like Christ was to turn upside down ideas about what it meant to be in community with one another and to have influence.

Verses 6 through 11 in our scripture today are a section of the Bible called the Christ Hymn. Paul may have borrowed these words from a hymn that was sung about Jesus, and it uplifts both the human and divine nature of Christ. Jesus emptied himself, becoming a human and living humbly among us instead of using his power as God to hold material reign over the Roman Empire. Jesus went to what would have been only for the lowest of the low in society by being crucified. In his life, death, and resurrection, Christ shows us that earthly power and privilege are shadows compared to the kingdom of God.

We are called to live lives that are humble and selfless, following Christ’s example in his own life. The Connections commentary notes, “Christian humility does not require low self-esteem or a rigorous program of self-diminishment. The challenge is not to reduce the self but to reorient it, that is, to ‘let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.’ To have this mind is to walk toward the fullest possible understanding of ourselves and what surrounds us, including God.”

In order to more fully understand ourselves and to grow into the people we were created to be, we have to take on a willingness to learn from one another. Paul calls for unity in the church through mutual encouragement, compassion, sympathy, and humility—through looking out for the interests of others, not just our own. Acting with humility means humanizing all and seeing one another as children of God, which by its nature then compels us to advocate for freedom and equity for all because of this shared identity. In this divided time in our nation and world, humility comes in the form of celebrating one another’s successes, taking care of one another, winning and losing gracefully, and listening with the goal to learn, not to be right. Humility and loving our neighbor looks like the simple act of wearing a mask, signaling to those around us that there is much unknown in the world right now, but what we do know is that we have a responsibility to care for one another.

This call to humility and to Christlike living begins with relationship. We see a lot of examples of humility in scripture—Jesus ate with all kinds of people; he washed the disciples’ feet; the woman threw herself at Jesus and used her hair to anoint him. These positions of vulnerability are a cry out for relationship and for connection with those around us.

This shows us that just as we crave relationship with God, so does God want a relationship with us. God wants to tear off a hunk of bread and pour a glass of wine and hear about your day. For God, it’s all about relationship— it’s not that God is high up and deigning to grace us with God’s presence (Jesus, after all, overturned all the ideas that he was coming as an

earthly king). But rather, God truly cares. And so it should be with us. Humbling ourselves isn't recognizing that we are better than someone else and then deciding to spend time with them anyways. True humility comes when we see that we all have something to say and to share with the world. God is at work in every circumstance.

Our church mission committee is currently reading the book *When Helping Hurts*. In it, the authors discuss how churches can work alongside those we are trying to serve in a way that is helpful and not trying to "save" anyone. They write, "We are not bringing Christ to poor communities [...] Hence, a significant part of working in poor communities involves discovering and appreciating what God has been doing there for a long time! This should give us a sense of humility and awe as we enter poor communities, for part of what we see there reflects the very hand of God."

God is present throughout the world and the ages, and our responsibility as the church is to participate in the good work that God has been and continues to do. We continue to evaluate ourselves and our ministries to act in ways that promote equality, relationship, and listening, knowing that we still have much to learn. Wherever we show up- whether it's in Wilson Hall or in Lebanon- we pray that we might discover God in a new way through our interactions.

In all that we do as a church or as individuals, we are called to come to the table willing to learn and to put others first. This doesn't mean that we are not to share our thoughts or that we are going to agree all the time—the whole reason Paul wrote many of his letters was that church wasn't agreeing or working together! We aren't trying to emulate some perfect church. God has called the conflicted church in every age to do God's work in the world. What we *are* called to do is to learn to meet conflict and division with humility, self-emptying, and unity even when we disagree. And we do this because, as Paul writes in verse 13, "it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for God's good pleasure."

This humble, compassionate living can be lived out in both big and small ways. I love the story of the loaves and fishes—when Jesus performs a miracle and out just a few pieces of bread and fish, hundreds of people are fed. There's an interpretation of this story that says that Jesus was not performing a miracle in a magical sense—perhaps he didn't actually make more food out of that little bit. The plethora came because, as the baskets were passed around, everyone added in the little bit that they'd brought with them, and at the end all were fed and there was plenty to spare. *That* was the miracle of that day. We don't hear anything about people leaving with a sack of bread because they hoarded it for themselves, but instead we know that everyone had enough.

That's the humble life that Jesus is calling us to live. A life where we share the gifts and talents that we have been given with one another and see that when we all add in a bit, something beautiful happens.

We see that here at this church. Everyone here has a calling, and we know that different people are called to participate in different ways in the life of this church. Humility allows us to respond to our own calling while lifting up all the many ways those around are called differently. We should celebrate our gifts and the many ways God shows up in our world. On our staff, Michael is blessed with musical abilities that none of the rest of us have, while Kim is creative and helps the church learn in tangible ways. Linzi connects with our youth while offering deep theological reflection on justice; Cheri orchestrates an innovative preschool that lifts up the children's own interests and gifts. Sara Chang helps us share our stories; Sarah Cochran can explain all the numbers that are over our heads; and Glenda knows *everything*. Anne listens genuinely and compassionately, and Chris teaches and preaches in a way that sticks with you and

makes you think deeply about how God is at work in your life and in the world. And JR—he takes care of us all.

We could not function if we all had the same gifts, and we would not come up with new ideas if we weren't surrounded by a community that cares and wants to grow together. In our community of faith, let us celebrate differences of opinion as a way to learn and grow deeper in our faith and our understanding of the world (who wants to be surrounded by only people that think like you, anyways?)

In a world that seems not to want us to get along, may we strive to be connectors and to listen to one another. We are a *community* of faith, brought together to remind one another of God's love for each of us. How can we live a more humble, selfless, compassionate life both as individuals and as a church? We rest assured that when we think the baskets are empty and that there is no more left to fill us, together and through the grace of God we can perform the miraculous work of loving and taking care of one another. In all we do, may we love neighbor, love God, and walk humbly towards a more Christlike world. Amen.