

Worship Service for August 16th, 2020

Lord It's Hard To Be Humble

Welcome

Welcome back. I want to begin by thanking everyone who extended their best wishes to Michele and I on our wedding Anniversary this past Thursday. We are truly blessed.

With an abundant rain early in the week and some beautiful summer days just past we can truly say that these are days the Lord has made. So let us make each day a time for praise and prayer; a time for gratitude and generosity.

This is the time God has given us:

a time for singing and silence; a time for speaking and listening.

This is the life to which God calls us:

a life of humility and service; a life of faith and trust, a life in which we can be thankful for all of God's blessings. Let Us Pray.

Opening Prayer

Dear God, we give you thanks for all the blessings we enjoy:

the beauty and abundance of nature,

the love of family and friends,

the joy of knowing you and hearing your word.

Send your Spirit during this time of worship

so we might dream your dreams

and see visions of the world as you created it to be.

Guide our thoughts and actions.

Bring us closer to you so that we might do your will

and dwell in your presence forever. Amen.

Song

Our opening hymn today supports our theme this week on our need to humble ourselves in God's presence. The song is entitled "Make Me A Servant" and is sung by the Mar-a-na-tha Singers. Please enjoy.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r6U8O_WnPZY

Scripture: Luke 18:9-14 (NIV)

The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

⁹To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰"Two men went up

to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

¹³ "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

¹⁴ "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Sermon - "Lord It's Hard To Be Humble"

When I read today's scripture for some reason this old song popped into my head

*Oh Lord it's hard to be humble
When you're perfect in every way
I can't wait to look in the mirror
'Cuz I get better lookin' each day
To know me is to love me
I must be a hell of a man
Oh Lord it's hard to be humble
But I'm doin' the best that I can*

Now I guess you can tell from that rendition that I'm no Mac Davis and I'm not sure I actually know anyone who gets up in the morning and sings this song, but I think we are all trying to do the best that we can, and today's gospel story gives us some direction.

When Jesus called us to follow him, he didn't give us a list of personal qualities we were to develop like the

Apostle Paul did later in his letters. Instead, Jesus told stories, and these parables that he tells, once we figure out the underlying theme, make it pretty clear what is expected of us. Today's parable on the Pharisee and the tax collector is a continuing example:

Two men went to the temple to pray. One was insufferably arrogant, assuming himself to be superior to ordinary people. The other stood far off and humbly acknowledged his sinfulness. It's clear which of these two character traits Jesus calls for us to adopt.

Among the qualities Jesus thought appropriate for humans to possess, this is one which many have a hard time with. Humility.

Now you can sort of measure how well you're doing in matters like honesty and compassion and helpfulness. But how do you measure your humility? It's easy enough to tell when you're not being humble, but how do you know when you are being humble?

American poet Ralph Waldo Emerson once said that "A great man is always willing to be little." And I think there in lies one problem when it comes to humility. We have trouble in differentiating the difference between "being little" and the act of belittling our self.

We must understand that this is not what Jesus meant or what God wants. There is a gospel song which says, "O to be nothing, nothing." But we're not called to be nothing. We're called to be something, somebody for God.

Humility is not the same as belittlement. God created us, and we do not honor God by belittling God's creation. Our selfhood is important to God and so it should be important to ourselves. This is precisely why the second great commandment, the one following "You should love the Lord your God with everything you have," is "You should love your neighbor, "not " instead of yourself, but "as you love yourself."

I saw a disturbing cartoon once which showed a man standing in front of his mirror while shaving and saying, "If you are your own best friend, how come you don't like yourself any better than you do?" Behind the humor was a distressing element of truth that somewhere along the line he had heard that he wasn't supposed to feel good about himself.

I wondered if he had been subjected to this notion in sermons that were mispreached. Maybe the church has so stressed human sinfulness without similarly stressing human godlikeness, that one result is that some people have left the church in favor perhaps of a New Age religions or self help programs that enable them to feel better about themselves.

While I was searching for this ministry position as well as other times in the past that I needed to search for a job I found myself struggling while trying to write up my resume. How does one talk about our own good qualities and talents without coming across as proud or arrogant.

False modesty is not likely to get you a job. It's one thing to boast about yourself to the world. It's something quite different to respond honestly to the question, "Why should we hire you?"

I think it somehow poses the same dilemma as in the Mac Davis song that I tried to sing earlier in that how does one balance a confident attitude with a requirement to remain humble.

I have always liked St. Vincent de Paul words that "Humility is nothing but truth, and pride is nothing but lying, but Be careful not to mistake insecurity and inadequacy for humility! Humility has nothing to do with the insecure and inadequate! Just like arrogance has nothing to do with greatness!"

When I am researching a scripture to preach on I like to check out a web site that connects a painting to the scripture verse. The painting suggested in connection to our reading today was one called "The Presence in the Midst" by J. Dale Penrose.

It shows the interior of a great cathedral. Your attention is immediately drawn to the chancel area and the altar where bright candlelight illuminates the priests serving Eucharist to members of the congregation. Then you notice at the bottom corner of the painting in the shadows is a figure of a person kneeling in repentance and apparently feeling unqualified to approach the altar. And next to that humble figure in the shadows stands Jesus. If Jesus is to be found in that cathedral, it

was not most importantly at the altar but at the side of a repenting sinner.

Why is Jesus found there? Well, one reason is that the repenting heart is more able to receive the presence of Christ than the arrogant one. But I think there's another reason as well, and that is that Jesus wanted that person to understand that humility doesn't need humiliation. Repenting for behavior doesn't mean an apology for living.

The more I think about this the more I realize why Jesus is so important to me. And it isn't just his teachings, as important as they were, it's the whole manner of his life, the way he was with people, his unusually close relationship with God, so close that we refer to him as God's Son, his confidence and courage in his mission.. Jesus sees that the more humble and obedient to God he is, the more wise and at peace he will be in all that he does."

Jesus is the best picture God has ever given us.

I can relate to a person much more readily than I can relate to an idea or a concept or even a teaching. It's because of Jesus that I can relate personally to God and know God to be one of compassion. It's because of Him that I know God loves me to such a depth and so without condition that there is nothing I can do or say or think or feel or fail at that will diminish God's love for me.

Some people misunderstand the Christian Church to be a fellowship of do-gooders who think of themselves as a notch above everyone else. Now, I think most of us in the church know better than that, but maybe that's another way in which we have miscommunicated ourselves to the world.

Charles Clayton Morrison left us with an outstanding description of the Church. He said:

The Christian Church is not a society of integrated personalities, nor of philosophers, nor of mystics nor even of good people. It's a society of broken personalities, of men and women with troubled minds, of people who know they're not good. The Christian Church is a society of sinners. It is the only society in the world in which membership is based upon the single qualification that the candidates shall be unworthy of membership.

That's a humbling definition of being a church member and appropriately so. It doesn't lead me to claim some lofty moral status nor does it relegate me to the dung heap of failure and worthlessness. It enables me to be quite honest about myself, both my failures and my capabilities.

Our calling, yours and mine, is to become that kind of human being, to become Christlike. That doesn't mean we would all become carbon copies or that all of us who sought to be like Jesus would be a fellowship of indistinguishable clones.

It means that each of us would become the person Jesus would be if he had our personal history, our talents, our limitations, and our possibilities.

I think the late monk Thomas Merton identified the secret to humility when he said, "Humility is being precisely the person you actually are in the presence of God," which to me means that the secret of humility is not to focus on behaving in a certain way but to focus on the presence of God and yourself being in that presence always. Let us this week strive to do just that. Thanks be to God.

Let us pray a Prayer For Humility

So many voices trumpet their greatness, flaunt their power, squander their wealth; and all too many of them do so in Jesus' name.
Our world is broken daily by the foolish arrogance of men and women; And so we pray for the healing of humility to flood every corner of our world:
wherever there is exploitation and God-imaged people are dehumanized;
wherever there is neglect and the needs of the poorest are ignored;
wherever there is disdain, and the sacred value of creatures and earth are denied;
wherever there is violence,
and the gifts of difference and dignity are rejected.
Wherever people are tempted to think of themselves as better than others, more worthy, more deserving, more important;
may your humility break in and challenge us,
reminding us of our brokenness and need,
teaching us to serve and to love everyone
with the grace and humility you show toward us.
We pray all this in Jesus name who taught us to pray saying:
Amen.

We close out today's service with another number by the Mar-a-na-tha Singers entitled Humble Yourself. Have a Blessed Week until we meet again

<https://youtu.be/-YLxUIU72AM>