

In all Humility
Courage to Continue Series: Humility
Jubilee Mennonite Church
October 7, 2018
Thanksgiving Sunday

Purpose: To invite the congregation to the humility before the big truths of our world.

Message: As people of reconciliation, we are invited to a posture of humility alongside all, but most of all before God.

Scripture: Philippians 2:1-13 (I will read); Psalm 8

Synopsis: Humility is not a terribly popular quality. Confused with a poor self image (because if you are not the greatest, then you must think poorly of yourself) it is not often held up as a principle to be emulated. But humility, in its truer form, is a recollection of who we are within the context that we are. It is placing yourself within the broader relationship with others and with nature, and living within the good placement, and being blessed by that placement. As such it is not about feeling bad about yourself; often we need to be reminded that we are beloved of God far more than that God loves us more than others. It also puts us in right relationship with God and invites us to be conscious of who we are in that relationship, something for which we can be truly thankful. As a matter of reconciliation, we require humility to remember that we all are called to be in relationship with God, with each other, and with the earth to move forward well.

This is also World Communion Sunday and Thanksgiving Sunday. We will be celebrating communion this week.

Imitating Christ's Humility

There's a breed of humility which is itself a species of showing off.
- "The Esquimau Maiden's Romance"

2 If then there is any encouragement in Christ,
any consolation from love,
any sharing in the Spirit,
any compassion and sympathy,
² make my joy complete:

be of the same mind, having the same love,
being in full accord and of one mind.

³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit,
but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.

⁴ Let each of you look not to your own interests,
but to the interests of others.

⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

⁶ who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,

⁷ but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,
⁸ he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,

¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹ and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Shining as Lights in the World

¹² Therefore, my beloved,
just as you have always obeyed me,
not only in my presence,
but much more now in my absence,
work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;

¹³ for it is God who is at work in you,
enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Over the last couple of weeks as we have been sitting with core values of indigenous teaching—the grandfather teachings as they are called—you may have noticed something surprising. Simply this. There isn't anything massively or indicatively different about them. The values of courage, truth, honesty are the values that are common within our own culture when it comes to describing the well lived life. We hold up the need to be truthful, to live out the courage of our conviction in an authentic and honest way of being. These are common themes for us and fundamentally good ideas. Our society values these, at least in principle, as does long Christian tradition as well. The bridge between the values that cultures have been trying to instill is not a long one, even if some of the internal logic and story telling has a different flavour.

But then there is humility. Humility is a bit of departure from society as a whole and the values that help to form us and move us. If I were to ask you to sketch the perfect humble person, what might you draw? There is paper around—take me up on it if you like. I am guessing it is some sort of the a connection to the cartoon character like Eeore—lovely, cuddly and warm, but not a whole lot of fun to be around or with a high opinion of himself. Far from a glorified virtue in general company (not even a politician would run on their humility before all), it one which is held within Christian circles as a good idea, sure, but one of those notions that is out of place and out of time in the same breath. Living as we do with the notion of the self-made persona where pure competence and grit (to say nothing of personal self esteem and encouragement) where are bound as individuals solely and entirely with responsibility for the rise and fall of the self; a discipline that is not aided by, as Paul encouraged his readers to “thinking of others outside of yourself..” A certain bragging is to be expected in the world, and undue consideration or under appreciation of who and what I am in relation to others is often a problem.

Even when we are being humble, there is a certain competition that can set in. You know what I mean; the pathological inability to accept a reasonable complement for something you do well least you be seen as prideful? Say, for instance, the family's secret Zwibach recipe, which you know is not only the best recipe, but you also have the certain technique that makes all the difference, has to be taken as offhandedly “well, OK” or explained as having spent a little too

much time in the oven least you be taken as thinking of them as the most heavenly thing to be made out of gluten and flour in the last several decades, and yourself as responsible for them. And don't think just because I am using a baking metaphor to attach gender to it. Growing up, there was an art of keeping a clean car on the road the longest possible time that said a lot about a man. The satirist Mark Twain once wrote: *"There's a breed of humility which is itself a species of showing off."* I think that this is a breed that we Anabaptists have over the years gotten awfully good at cultivating. We have made the property of being humble about the personal quality about being a show off far more than anything to do with being in relationship with others, understanding that there is more to our world than just us, our needs, our wants, and our abilities to work within them and through them.

I think this is the humility that we need to recapture: the deep knowledge that we are not alone in this world, and as such, we humbly place ourselves within the broader context of the world at large. True humility is a functioning of valuing your own worth as it applies within the context of the community your worth is meant to serve. This is what the grandfather teachings of the Indigenous peoples are pointing to—remembering that we are connected beyond ourselves to people and groups bigger than us. And this is what Paul is holding up to us in modeling the way of Christ—reminding us that even with the full knowledge of who he was, and what he was (what God was in that time and space) God in Christ values the examples of self emptying connection that heals the world far greater than the self-destroying ownership of personal rights, personal ways. Have you ever given yourself 10 minutes to consider how completely and utterly exasperating the human condition must have been for Jesus? It is the stuff that we can hardly imagine. Here you are, the human incarnation of the creator of the universe, able to make the world anew from the ground up with a single word, and here has gets to muck about with a bunch of doubting and rather thick disciples to make your way in the world? There is a reason why the temptations in the desert were what they were—turn stones into bread; claim power for yourself; turn the way things are back upon their ears. They were all temptations to lay aside the connection that Jesus had to YHWH God in being about God's business in God's world, to forget who and what he was, why is was, and how we was to accomplish the mission of God, and become something altogether different. To forget about the connections that are there, and to do what he could have done if the world to whom he was connected was unimportant. That must

have been a true temptation for Jesus because he unlike anyone before or since wouldn't have been bragging; he could have just done it. For us, like Christ, true humility is to recognize your value and others value while looking up. It is to see there is far greater than ourselves into who we can become, who others can become, and how much more we can do and be.

Isn't that what Thanksgiving is all about; humility? We don't think of it this way because we, as I pointed out before, have a rather skewed sense of what it means to be humble. But I think it really is what we do when we give thanks: we unplug from this notion that the world we have is somehow or another is actually one of our own creation in the first place. Thanksgiving calls on us to recognize yet again that there is something higher than us in the world who gives what we need in the way that we need it. It calls us to recognize this as God's good gifts; it calls us to remember that these gifts are shared within a community whose reaches are the very ends of the earth. Thanksgiving calls us to remember our place within the world, and to lay aside what ever claim of ownership we might have over the stuff of life and living, and remember whose we are with gratitude. We cannot be truly grateful when we carry the assumptions that we somehow how earned our way in the world, or that we are magically entitled to what we have. We are not. What we have is from God, given to us to be shared with others. Who we are are people connected one to the other in the love of God. Humility asks us to remember that, not just to avoid being a lout that no one wants to listen to, but to practice the extraordinary notion that the world is occupied by more than just me and those who belong to me. That is an action of true humility: knowing who we are in the context of the others with whom we share the world.

It is exactly this type of humility that Paul reminds us was modeled for us by Jesus. It is exactly this type of humility. We must regain this sense of being with each other, of belonging one to the next in many areas of life. We need this for reconciliation. For too long the solutions to problems has consisted of dictating terms to be taken or left, robbing those with whom we walk of dignity and power. We must take on humility, acknowledging our connection one to the next for any real progress to be made. We also need this in the church. We need to recall that it is Christ who connects us across every boundary, every history, and every hurt. We need to come with awe and wonder to the feet of the cross which were we each belong without any exception ever. For as much as any theology ever will connect us, our common need for grace

will unite us far better than anything else. How do we do this? We reclaim our humility, place ourselves within the context of and reference to each and everyone else. It is this grace we know, this grace we claim, and this grace that invites us again and again into true thanksgiving.

May we each be given the means of praise as we celebrate all that we have been given in God's grace for the work of reconciliation one to the other across all that would divide us.