

Wading River Congregational Church

SERMONS IN PRINT

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Philippians 2:1-11 On Humility & Humanity

God calls us to be humble and hospitable to others, encouraging us to be welcoming of the “stranger”, as all are welcome to God’s banquet. From Jesus Christ, we are taught deeply about humility. Paul and Timothy wrote this letter to the Christians in ~56 A.D. from a prison believed to be in Ephesus (where the Cayster River flows into the Aegean sea-Turkey). The purpose of his letter was to thank the Christians in Philippi and encourage their faith in Jesus Christ. Like the first reading of Luke 14:7-14, Paul focuses us upon humility and humanity.

It is most humbling for me to be here among this congregation this morning, engaged discussing Scripture and reflecting on the life of Jesus Christ and his teachings. We understand well the central elements of which Luke and Paul speak: humility and humanity. The verse from **Luke 14** depicts for us how, by example, Jesus teaches us to be humble. At the banquet table of a Pharisee priest, Jesus—certainly the most notable and undoubtedly their most notorious guest, observes how seats are taken. He is closely watched for his reactions and Jesus offers a parable illuminating the consequences of conceit and the value of humility. It spares us the humiliation of (Luke 14: 9)

“Give this man your seat”.

When performed with a genuine heart, humility expresses our linkages to all others, our bonds to all others, and our deepest respect for their worth—rather than our own.

The act of humility is “proactive”. We must both humble ourselves and extend ourselves to others. For what is the “lowest” place? For our society today, there are many low places, places that we should encourage ourselves to occupy, so that others may be elevated. The marginalized, distraught, and oppressed who often occupy the low places need us to elevate them, their spirits, and their faith in God. Speaking to one in need from the low place will always work better than from some higher place. By placing ourselves in the lowest place, we are sure to raise God’s message of love and hope to all.

Paul’s letter to the Philippians (Phil 2:1-11) also reflects on our need for humility (Phil 2:3)

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit”, extends to

“But in humility consider others better than yourselves”.

He then encourages us all with the powerful words (Phil 2:5) “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus”. Follow the example of Jesus Christ Paul offers, for a more compelling and moving example of humility does not exist.

⁵Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

⁶Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,

⁷but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

⁸And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!

A pastor from a church in the Philippines (the Rev. R. Batausa) shared with me a story well-known in the Christian church. The story tells of a woman who in asleep hears the voice of God speaking to her in a dream. God speaks and says “I shall come to visit your home tomorrow”. She awakes in the morning inspired deeply by her dream and the words of God, believing in those words and that God would visit her on this day. She prepares her simple home with the very best intentions, selecting her best linens, her best foods, and her best outfit, awaiting her special visitor. The day nearly draws to a close and the woman is distraught, questioning her dream and the words of God. As the sun sets, there is a knock at the door and the woman delights with a great spirit. She opens the door and to her surprise stands a beggar in tattered clothes seeking food and shelter as the nighttime falls. Dejected, she simply says to the beggar, “Go away, I am expecting a very special visitor. I have no place for you”, and she closed the door. The expected visitor did not arrive and the woman found herself in despair, convinced that she was silly and the dream was only a dream. “Why would God visit me?”, she said as midnight passed.

Some days later and after a tiring day of labor, the woman fell asleep, again into a dream in which God again appeared. She asked God, “I was so inspired by Your words, yet You did not come as You said you would, You did not come to my home.” God answered, “I knocked at your door that day, but you never invited Me in”.

Humility and humanity are too easily extended to those with whom we feel comfortable, to our friends, our family, and our associates, which Jesus reminds us that **(Luke 14:12)**

“they may invite you back and so you will be repaid”.

We must extend our love, our care and our blessings to those who cannot repay us. Those who occupy the “low” seat need to be elevated. We need to take the low seat, if we are to embrace the teachings of Jesus Christ on humility and humanity.

As Christians, we all embrace these central teachings of Jesus Christ, they are extensions of (Luke 10:27) in which we learn

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.”

But at times these words can seem so hard to put into action. To be “proactive” in our humility and humanity means to make us comfortable with the uncomfortable, at home with the homeless, and at peace with those who may not know peace.

We often feel that we may have done all that we can do, that we have pressing needs that restrict us in both our humility and our humanity, as one cannot discount such feelings. From time to time, we all have

suffered from such pressures. Perhaps we should effort to make such pressures a good time to look around ourselves and the blessing of God that have showered down upon us in our lives. Every moment of every day, is a gift. Our moments together with members of our family, community, and greater humankind are gifts, gifts that we not only share, but can through giving share with others.

We are here in our church on this glorious Sunday morning, among friends, brought together by the Holy Spirit that fills us with love and with hope. The final verses of Paul's Letter to the Philippians are believed to be a very early Christian hymn, sung by our Christian brothers and sisters in the decade following the crucifixion and resurrection of the Christ Jesus that deserves repeating:

⁹Therefore God exalted him to the highest place

and gave him the name that is above every name,

¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,

in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,

to the glory of God the Father.

Let us keep in mind that the hospitality of God showers down on us all. Through humility and humanity, Jesus both teaches and encourages us all to greater spiritual hospitality that extends from the lowest seat to the very throne of God.

We need to remember that God loves us, Jesus loves and saves us, and we, in turn, should love each other and embrace Jesus Christ our Savior. Our hope springs from the word of God and the example of Jesus.

Let us pray:

Oh Heavenly Father, maker of heaven and earth, we thank you for your blessings and grace upon us.

We are a decidedly fallen people in a fallen world, desperately in need Your continued divine inspiration and guidance.

We pray O Lord, that we remember to seek the "lowest" seat; a home for the homeless, a word of love and kindness for the dispirited, a friendly "hello" to a stranger.

From the lowest seat, may we proclaim Your word and the hope of our Savior Jesus Christ, reaching out from the very depths of our heart to all.

Amen.