

## **“Cultivating the Humility of Jesus in our Lives”**

We had a “God moment” in the staff meeting this past Monday when we realized that in the Gospel text for today, Jesus is teaching about humility. The reason that this was a God moment is that we have adopted Dr. Gary Smalley’s 4 Categories for these meditation cards that you received as you came into worship today and this month’s theme is humility.

As we begin this month of daily reflection on these passages dealing with humility, it is wonderful that we can begin by hearing from our Lord Jesus on this subject.

Jesus is present at a dinner given at the home of a leader of the Pharisees. He noticed how the guests coming in were gravitating toward the places of honor around the table.

It was then that Jesus said to them, “When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give this person your place’, and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place.

Rather, Jesus told them to go ahead and sit in the lowest place and perhaps they will be invited to come up higher, and then they would be honored rather than disgraced.

And then, in summary, Jesus said, “For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

The Sunday school class that I am facilitating downstairs in the Conference Room beginning next Sunday is called, "Guarding Your Child's Heart". This parable Jesus told is a perfect example of what guarding someone's heart is all about. In this parable, Jesus was trying to guard his hearers' hearts. For he knew that if someone chose that higher place and was asked to move, that person's heart would be hurt by that. He or she would be embarrassed by having to move to a lower place. Jesus is trying to head off that hurt, head off that embarrassment, by teaching them to choose the lower place rather than the higher one.

This Sunday School Class for parents, grandparents and godparents is about that very same thing. It is about helping children learn God's way of being and doing in an effort to head off situations where their hearts will be injured. Let's say that our children were able to learn and internalize this one truth in our Gospel parable which is don't be competing with others for a place of honor at a dinner. Rather, just sit in the lower place to begin with. And let's say that an eleven year old girl is invited to a birthday party of a friend. She comes in and sees where the child having the birthday is going to sit. If she knew this little teaching from Jesus, she might take a seat down the table from the birthday child. If she had never heard this story, she might naturally rush to sit beside the birthday child. How will she feel when the birthday girl comes in holding hands with her best friend and asks her to move down so the best friend can sit beside her? We might make the mistake of minimizing such a situation and say, "Oh, that's not such a big deal."

However, that incident is one prick, one injury of that child's tender little heart. And there will be others. How many injuries, how many

pricks does it take before that little heart begins to shut down? Wouldn't we want to do everything in our power to avoid those little injuries to our children's hearts? That is what the class is about.

That is also what this Scripture meditation process is about for all of us with these cards. In computer terms, it is about installing these spiritual anti-virus programs in our hearts so that our hearts and the hearts of our children will process information as children of God rather than as spiritual orphans trying to find our own way in the world.

Humility is such an elusive idea, isn't it? It is one of those things that if we say we have it, we probably don't, right? Therefore, it is an unspeakable virtue that we hope to cultivate. Why? Because, if we become humble, we will be more like our Lord Jesus, and it is He who we are trying to follow, trying to emulate in our lives. Humility is something that we long for but probably will never be able to identify in ourselves. But, it makes us really happy when we see it in others, doesn't it?

For example, it warmed our hearts to hear of Mother Teresa's work among the poorest of the poor. In choosing to work among the poorest of the poor, she in effect took the lowest seat at the banquet, didn't she? Or when we hear someone like Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa speak, his humility is evident.

The best example of humility, of course, comes from Jesus Himself. We read in St. Paul's letter to the Philippians,

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,  
who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God

as something to be exploited,  
but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.  
And being found in human form,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him  
and gave him the name  
that is above every name,  
so that at the name of Jesus  
every knee should bend,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue should confess  
that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus found his affirmation in His relationship with His Father in Heaven. Therefore, He had nothing to prove and was able to empty Himself and humble Himself and to become obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Because He humbled Himself, God exalted Him and gave Him the name which is above every Name, that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bend and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Remember what Jesus said in today's Gospel, "For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

The word humility comes from the same root word as the word humus which has to do with soil, with the earth. Humility is about being

grounded. It is about having ourselves rooted in God. We are reminded of Psalm One which talks about God's people being like trees planted by the water and bearing their fruit in due season.

Humility is about knowing "our place" in relation to God. When you hear me say that, you probably immediately think, Oh yes, God is so great and we are so insignificant compared to God. That's our place. But, that is exactly what I DON'T MEAN. Humility is about knowing that you and I and every human being are God's children. And as God's children, we are loved fully, completely and unconditionally just because we exist. To be loved by God, we don't have to be beautiful or successful. God simply loves us and treasures us (PERIOD). God loves us like any loving parent, but unlike any earthly parent, God's love is perfect. I am reminded of that verse in scripture, "Perfect love casts out fear."

When we know our place in relation to God, when we know that we are God's children, then it puts some of our fears to rest. If, in humility, we are able to look to God for our affirmation, then we will always have affirmation. When we look to God and know that we are loved perfectly forever, then it keeps us from being afraid that others won't love us or that we won't or don't fit in. Some of those things cease to matter, because, again, we get our affirmation from God, from Jesus, whose love and compassion and mercies have no end.

When we talk about humbling ourselves before God, we are not talking about cowering before this all-powerful God, because again, God loves us more than we can imagine. Rather, when we talk about humbling ourselves before God, we are talking about acknowledging God as our Leader, our Guide, our Source. When we call Jesus Lord, we are

acknowledging our allegiance to Him and our desire to follow Him, to do what He says.

For example, in the last part of our Gospel reading, Jesus told his host, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, “Do not invite those who can invite you in return. Rather, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind.” And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” I think that this is the motivation for our Welcome Table here at Grace which will begin on September 23<sup>rd</sup> and continue on Monday evenings. Our hope is to reach out to those in need and provide them a healthy meal and a place to eat that meal where they are loved and cherished. And of course, if any of you feel called to serve in that ministry, they can always use the help.

And perhaps the most fantastic news about God’s call to humility and obedience is that God has given us the Holy Spirit to empower us to live in accordance with Jesus’ teachings. As we do this, as we take baby steps in Jesus’ Way, we discover the joy of following Him, and we realize that His Way for us is so much better than charting our own course. We realize that God is with us and in us, and that we are loved.

As we walk in God’s love, we find that humility that we seek as God transforms us into the likeness of Jesus day by day. Let us pray.

Dear Lord, We pray that you would assist us during this month of September as we meditate on what it means to cultivate the humility of Jesus in our lives. Thank you for your affirmation of us, your love for us and your presence with us and in us, now and forever.

AMEN.