

Sermon Psalm 118:1-9, 21-25, 29 Genesis 12:1-4a John 3:1-17 Feb. 17, 2008
Living Christ Ways - The Fruits of Faithfulness

#2 Humility - Humble Enough to be Saved and a Servant

Humility - Having the strength and wisdom to know that whatever strength and wisdom you have is the gift from one who is stronger and wiser than you will ever be.

Humility - Letting the light of whatever goodness and truth and love is in your life shine so others can see it in and yet give thanks to God who gives it to you.

Humility - Knowing how blessed you are and worshipping the one from whom you know your blessings come.

Humility - Setting your aim in life to be - not being a more perfect you, but a more perfect Christian.

Humility - a character trait, you cannot claim for yourself, but can only be attributed to you by others who see it at work in your life.

Humility - at the heart of a God centered life.

Is it at the center of our lives? Are we humble?

Let us pray.

Lord, may the words of my mouth, and the thoughts of these your loving and faithful people, but acceptable in your sight, and your good word to us this day in Christ. Amen.

Maybe we can see humility best by looking at its opposite - Pride! It used to be called a sin. If we still believed it was a sin, every politician would need a portable confessional booth on his or her campaign trail. And - truth be known - we need our own, too. Pride is much on display these days - and humility polls poorly. It is not a life style of choice by many.

Presidents are seldom picked now from persons who don't tell us with a million bucks in ads how wonderful they are - or surely will be if elected. Humility - giving credit when credit is due for what ever gifts we have - is a fading facet and factor in life. But the old saying is proving true - Pride goes before the fall.

The Big Three Auto makers, no longer so big, could have benefited from a little humility - an openness to learn from others. So could the Church - our Church. Maybe what we are doing is not the best we could be doing...

Mayor Kwame could have used a lot of humility - and if he hadn't thought he was and is God's gift to Detroit, he might actually have tried humbly to be as nearly as he could, a servant from God for God's people.

And we would all live richer fuller lives by far if we were more humble. You can hear the call to us, for us, in the call of God to Abraham.

Abraham - Blessed by God - set apart, called out, to lead a people who would be a blessing
To others.

You can hear the call ring through the story of Nicodemus. The call to a life lived more fully focused on God and God's will. Nicodemus - a leader of the Jews - comes to Jesus - a country boy turned city street preacher. What a step of faith for Nicodemus to take. To step away from pride of position and power, a humbling act that left him with a softened heart, learning to be moved by the spirit.

But Jesus wanted from Nicodemus even more than his first step of searching faith. He wanted for him, and for us, a deep humility - that knows all hope for us is not in us - but is ours by faith in God alone.

So - Jesus addressed straight on Nicodemus' pride and ours - with a catch phrase few Presbyterians like. If you ever were a Baptist - raise your hands. If we Presbyterians get a little nervous here - these folk can help you. Jesus talked to Nicodemus about being born again. Or actually - born from above. We would be Christians? We must be born again.

All pride in what we've done, or have become, washed away. New trust alone in God and God's promises to us in Christ. Birth, and new birth, are powerful positive images of our dependence upon God. Birth, whenever, is not our doing. We can take no pride in it. Our birth, or rebirth, is dependent on a force far larger than ourselves.

The Apostle Paul saw this core truth about life in Christ - He saw in Jesus the humility he believed needs to be seen at work in us all. Paul wrote in Philippians.... *If there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the spirit, be of the same mind - in humility regard others as better than yourselves - Let the mind that was in Christ be in you - who, being found in human form, he humbled himself - There fore my beloved - know - it is God who is at work in you, making you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*

Humility - to be born again - to let ourselves be directed in our living by the Spirit of the living Christ And Jesus put it this way - Let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works - and give glory to your father in heaven.

Humility - do good for the good of it, not for any personal gain. Do the good in God's name and for his sake. To God be the glory, great things he hath done.

Isn't that the goal for our living - giving God the glory, and by our own faithfulness helping others to do the same? At the heart of Nicodemus' visit with Jesus are the words best known perhaps of all the Bible .. *God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.*

In the early church the Christians referred to each other as saints - and someone has described a saint as a person who lets the light of God shine through their life, their living, into the world for others to see. It's a good way to talk about humility.

Lewis Mudge does - in these words...

The greatest contribution a human being can make to his or her day is the living of a life, however humble and obscure, which will introduce into the society some of the gifts God most wishes the world to have. REPEAT!

It is our challenge as Christians - to live and work and do and love - not for our glory, but for God's. It is one of the challenges we face in adding to our facilities - in building to share the Faith Enrichment Center...

We have a church policy that says all gifts great and small, that all gifts are welcome in furthering God's work and in support of Christ's ministry at OLCC,P... But - there are no naming of rooms or gifts.... All gifts are and will be recognized and a memorial book will be kept listing the gifts and donors on display.

But... except for the Bibles and Hymn Books, all the same, no plaques or gift designation signs are displayed. To God be the Glory, Yes. Great things God has done - even through a David, or a John, or a Paul, or - a very generous member of the Church. But - no Jone's steeple, or Robertson room, or Anderson library.

Humbly - we seek - to give God the Glory. Because, because, in the end, at the end of the journey, our hope will lie wholly with God.

Tony Snow, former newsperson, and Press Secretary for President Bush, has under gone two major bouts with cancer. And the second time it caused him to write about it in ways that sound the call for us to live more humble lives.

He writes...

Blessings arrive in unexpected packages, in my case, cancer. I don't know why I have cancer, and I don't much care. It is what it is. But it defines a central function of our existence. We are fallen. We are imperfect. Our bodies give out. But despite this - God offers us the possibility of salvation and grace.

We are reminded in Christ we are born not into death, but into life... that goes on forever. And - he wrote. - There is nothing wilder than a life of humble virtue - for it is through selflessness and service that God wrings from our bodies and spirits the most that we ever could give, the most we ever could offer, and the most we ever could do.

We can let love change everything ... knowing we are imperfect Knowing we will die... humbled by this knowledge.... Snow says.... *God bids us to choose;*

Do we believe, or do we not? Will we be bold enough to love, daring enough to serve, humble enough to submit, and strong enough to acknowledge our limitations?

That's Humility - To God be the Glory - Yes.

Made known in Christ like service, let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your father in heaven.

Tony Snow asks the Psalmist's question - *what is man that thou art mindful of him?*

We don't know much, Snow says, but we know this: no matter where we are, no matter what we do, no matter how bleak or frightening our prospects, each and every one of us who believe, each and every day, lies in the same safe and impregnable place, in the hollow of God's hand.

That's God's promise to us in Christ - and it is ours - it can only be ours - if we are humble enough to receive such a gift of grace. If we accept the fact that we must be born again - born not to be our own persons, But - through the spirit of Christ, in the sacrament of Baptism, be born anew as Believers - as ones who trust our whole existence, our hope for today and tomorrow, and all the tomorrows there will ever be, not to our own merit, but to God's amazing love for us in Christ.

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Amen.

David W. Robertson, Pastor

Psalm 118 -

On this Sunday when we will be talking about humility - we are reading now from a kind of humble Psalm. Some of you know the strange and kind of wonderful story of psalm 118.

It kind of gets lost in the middle of things - even though it contains some very familiar words.

The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief corner stone...

This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it...

Still - because the shortest psalm is just before it - 117, and the longest psalm is just after it - 119 - it sometimes gets lost in the middle.

And that is the truly remarkable thing about Psalm 118 - it is right in the middle of the bible - there are 594 chapters in the bible before Psalm 118 and 594 after it. Add those up - and the total number of chapters in the Bible is 1188, or Psalm 118 verse 8 ... Listen now to verses from this psalm - Especially verses 8 and 9....

