

Philippians 2:1-11
Humility
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Philippians 2 is one of those high water marks in the Scriptures. Throughout the Church's history most scholars agree that this is an ancient hymn, followers of Jesus shared, pointing their attention to Godhead who, instead of remaining distant and apart, entered time and space to share our humanity.

And what is the quality that is exemplified in this transcendent, triune relationship? Humility. It is not overwhelming power. It's not awe-inspiring regality. The essence of God's identity, as Paul describes it, between the Father Son and Spirit is humility.

Humility is not our favorite virtue. In fact it's not even something we really know how to talk about. For example: when interviewing for a job and asked what your greatest strength is, has anyone ever answered: "I'm really humble." That doesn't work. It's a little easier to go the other way I think, what's your greatest weakness? I just work too hard.

No parent has ever looked down at their new born baby and said, this child will grow up to be humble. What they should be saying is this child will grow up to humble us.

We confuse humility with low self-esteem. But the reality is that those who have humility have tremendous esteem. Not just self-esteem, and not the kind of *steem* that comes from having the right house, or the right career, or the right friends, or achievements. No, those who are humble have the kind of esteem that comes from knowing that they are secure in the love of God.

In our text this morning the Apostle Paul paints a picture of this heavenly relationship. The theological term is the Trinity. In unity and love, the Father, Son, and Spirit move in a mutual manner of joy and love and service. Genesis 1 describes a moment when this artistic and creative God was intricately fashioning humanity, one said to the others, "Hey, let's do something really cool, let's make them in our image."

Then, as Paul will later say in the book of Galatians, "in the fullness of time," at the moment of greatest need, Jesus looked to the Father and said "I'm leaving this in order, I'm needed there as one of them." Here Paul points out, He didn't regard equality with God as something to grasp, something to hold with a white knuckle grip. But he humbled himself.

This is not the posture of faith. In our life with God, we recognize that true life is not something that we earn, or attain—reaching and grasping for it with all we've got. It was not the posture of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane when he said "not my will, but thine be done." The life of faith is always something that we receive, our posture is one of open hands. It knows that it can rest in a posture of receptivity and humility because it knows the one who is at the center of it all.

We see this deep sense of security and esteem at the heart of the triune relationship between God the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. The Son humbles himself, releasing his place of honor among the Godhead, descending to us. As God in human flesh, Jesus did not float along on a higher plane

than the people around him, just the opposite, he took the form of a servant, caring for the lowest of the low. He did the unthinkable when instead of leaving us to our own devices, he allowed himself to be placed upon a cross. Then in Fatherly love and compassion, God exalted the Son, lifting him up, putting him in the place where every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

When Paul says this, what he is communicating to us is that there is nowhere in all of creation, not on earth, not in the heavenly realm, not even under the earth in the realm of death, where the savior has not been, and will not go to reach you with the love of God. When you are at your lowest, he can say unequivocally: "I've been there too." This is what it means to have peace with God through Jesus.

Carl Jung, the founder of analytical psychology, tells a story of a man who asks a Rabbi, why is it that in ancient times God was revealed so often, and now no one ever sees God? And the Rabbi responded by saying: "Because now no one can bow low enough."

Yahweh, Addonai, El Shaddai (God of the Mountain), in an act of divine humility and total security becomes the servant.

This is the God we worship, the God who is at the very core, gracious. And when you encounter this kind of love, this manifold grace, there is only one thing you can and should do, give it away. Grace, after all, is receiving what you cannot earn, could never hope to repay, and that which you can never lose. In a society that is obsessed with getting what it earns or deserves, and demanding what's rightfully theirs, grace is a scandalous notion. People will say, I just what I deserve. What you deserve is judgment and condemnation. That's the last thing in the world you want. What you want is the grace you don't deserve, but are been given by the God who is at the very core humble.

Now many of you are good Presbyterians, you understand this grace thing. But the scandalous truth of it is that with grace it's never a zero-sum game. If Dan has more, it doesn't mean there's any less for me. With God there is always more love to go around, and in that way, we are free to pursue the family business, giving grace to others.

You are exalted in Christ, so that you may also join him in being a servant to others. And if you don't enjoy and grow in your capacity for humble service, you're not doing it right.

We have a humility issue in our country right now. And as a result, we're not hearing one another. And because the less we are heard, the more inclined we are to shout, we keep shouting at one another, and no one's hearing. Sounds like Einstein's definition of insanity to me—all we are doing is shouting past one another.

Our nation is gripped by chronic fear, fear of losing something beloved, fear of never being afforded the gifts enumerated by our founding documents, fear that the land we love is changing and becoming something unfamiliar to us, fear that this land will never truly be home. And fear is never a unifying principle. It is also entirely foreign to a life that has been gripped by the compelling, transformative, unparalleled grace of Jesus Christ.

At its core I believe what we see in our nation is a Theological issue, it is a misunderstanding of grace issue. One who lives with the fear they may be losing their footing in society, that their power or their place may be joined by another, begs the question: "if others have more, does that mean I

will have less?" And in the worldly economy these are the kind of questions that rip us apart. But in God's economy, in the Kingdom of God we do not operate with a zero-sum mentality. In the Kingdom of God there is no limit to grace that God makes available to you, and through you to others.

By grace you are adopted into the family of God and that is greater than any allegiance you might ever pledge. By grace you are afforded the courage to place your needs second and make someone else's flourishing a matter of priority. By grace you are free from white-knuckling it through life, and are free to live with open handed generosity. By grace you are saved by faith and that is now the most important reality in the world for you. By grace you can pursue a life of humility and service instead of self-esteem, because God has already given you all the steam you could ever need.