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“Survey Said: Humility”
James 3:13-18; Mark 9:33-37

Today’s sermon topic, as you can see, is “HUMILITY.” Now here is a word that can be interpreted in many ways, both positively and negatively: running the gamut from its root word ‘**humble**’... generally thought of as compliment... to a word like ‘**humiliate**’, which does NOT have as favorable a meaning. For our purposes today, I would define “humility” simply “to put others ahead of oneself.” As I considered some of the various ways this word can be used, I found it amusing to see just how MANY people **expounded** on this term. There seemed to me to be an almost ‘oxymoronic’ quality to having **so many** folks go to **great lengths** to show their **wisdom** concerning the topic of **humility!** As one cartoon said, *“Let’s quote Bible scripture about humility on FB, Twitter, and Google +, while we upload massive amounts of pictures of ourselves.”* Here’s a few other examples... ones that run from the ridiculous to the sublime...

One of the ones that I first came across was this one: *“Uncertainty is a sign of humility and humility is just the ability or willingness to learn.”* Like it? I did too... and then I noted its author... Hollywood personality **Charlie Sheen**. If you know anything about this former star of “Two and a Half Men,” **humility** would NOT be a word I would associate with his life.

Oscar Levant was an American pianist/composer/radio/TV personality in mid-1900’s. Moreover, one who could turn a clever phrase. He declared that *“What the world needs more of is geniuses with humility... there are so few of us left.”* His tongue-in-cheek comment would go well with a much less talented, but more widely known successor, **Ted Turner**, who said that *“If I only had a little humility, I’d be perfect.”* The difference between the two was that Turner was probably not kidding... a ‘legend in his own mind’...

And speaking of ‘legends,’ I had to include this one by legendary baseball Hall of Fame ‘philosopher’ **Yogi Berra**... *“It ain’t the heat... it’s the humility.”*

Perhaps the funniest one I saw was also the most memorable. It was by an Asian Indian commentator named Navjot Singh Sidhu, who said that *“Humility is like underwear... you have*

to wear it, but should not show it.” Hmm... maybe this one is akin to that saying that ‘Character is what you do when no one is looking...’

One of the best secular quotes I saw with regards to the importance of humility was by a basketball coach. Not just ANY coach. Arguably the greatest one of all time, ‘the Wizard of Westwood,’ former UCLA coach **John Wooden**. Wooden warned that *“Talent is God-given. Be humble. Fame is man-given. Be grateful. Conceit is self-given. Be careful.”* For God-given talents, we should be **humble**. For our man-given fame, be **grateful**. For self-given conceit... be **careful**.

Pretty sound advice from one who knew a lot about ‘God-given talent,’ and received many accolades from his peers. And I think he was quite careful when it came to that self-conceit. It should come as no surprise that Wooden was a Christian. He actually belonged to our neighbor’s denomination, First Christian Church. I read that he once uttered a statement that I very much resonate with... that you may have heard me say as well: *“If I were ever prosecuted for my religion, I truly hope there would be enough evidence to convict me.”* A hope we ALL should share, no matter our profession...

In today’s Gospel reading, there was a discussion that you might say could have served as evidence to ‘drop the charges’ of ‘committing Christianity.’ Jesus and his disciples had been out on the road, and obviously there was a disagreement between them. For when they got to the house where they were staying, he asked them *“**What were you arguing about on the way?**”* (Mark 9:33) (Though I’m thinking that was pretty much a rhetorical question... that Jesus knew *quite* well what they were arguing about!) The Scripture goes on to say that at this *“**They were silent, for they had argued about who was the greatest.**”* (Mark 9:34) Yeah, I guess that they *were* silent...

It has always struck me as highly ironic that these guys who had been such ‘up close and personal’ eyewitnesses to both the ‘greatness’... and the **humility**... of Jesus would wind up in an argument of who of THEM would be ‘the greatest.’ REALLY!? They sure hadn’t heard that type of discussion from HIM! I guess it was only human, that though they recognized that Jesus was definitely the ‘top dog’, there was yet the question of who was **second**-in-command. He had first place wrapped up, but there was still a ‘wild card’ spot open. 😊 AND, you can’t blame

them for wanting to be great LEADERS for the cause of Christ. So should we ALL! They were just still learning from their Lord the pattern for what 'greatness' in leadership looked like. They were used to great leaders like Caesar, or Moses, or David... strong in battle, ones who stood up to their enemies with fierce determination. Jesus would show to them a different kind of 'strength'... a different kind of 'determination.'

We read that in the face of their embarrassed silence, Jesus ***"sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, 'Whoever wants to be first must be the last of all and servant of all.'" (Mark 9:35)*** To get his point across, Jesus sat his friends down and 'splained it' to them. 'Come. Sit. In my 'economy,' the way to get ahead is to put others ahead of yourself. You want to be 'king?' To do so, you must in truth be a 'servant.'

And then, to make his sermon illustration hit home, it says that ***"he took a little child and put it among them."*** (Mark 9:36) So what, did he just magically *produce* one? No. What that says to me is that even tho the 12 were there right with Him, there were obviously women and children in the immediate area. Perhaps one of the family that was serving as a 'B & B' to the Master and his followers. But what it reminds me is that Jesus message was for ALL. Men, women and children. That one of the 'greatest' things we can have is for children to be present to hear God's Word proclaimed. That, in the 'immortal' words of Disney's *"High School Musical," "we're all in this together!"* OK, for those of you who would like a *little* more 'scholarly' reference, here's one by Russian philosopher Fyodor Dostoevsky: *"The soul is healed by being with children."* I think that most ALL of us here have experiences such 'healing' of our souls by children...

The Scriptures go on to say that Jesus took that child in his arms and said to His disciples, ***"Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes ME... but not just me, but the One who SENT me!"*** (Mark 9:37) His words remind me of other statements he made about children: ***"Let the little children to come to me, for the kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these."*** (Matthew 19:14) And in His strongest statement concerning the GREAT worth of our SMALLEST assets, Jesus warns us ALL: ***"Unless you become like children, you'll never enter the kingdom of heaven. (That) Whoever becomes humble like a child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."*** (Matthew 18:3-4)

WOW. 'Unless you become like **children**, you CANNOT enter the kingdom of heaven.' And you thought it was important to listen to the PASTOR! Maybe we should have our youngest members preach on the importance of being 'humble.' And what does that mean? Weak? Inferior? Low self-esteem? NO!! In the words of 'some' popular Christian author... either C.S Lewis or Rick Warren, depending on where you look... *"Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less."*

By NO means does God want you to hold yourself in LOW esteem. Indeed, you should think of yourself in HIGH regard, because God loved you and me enough to send His only begotten Son to DIE for us. As we seek to live a life that honors that **ultimate sacrifice** for us, we know that the same God who raised Jesus from the grave will do the same for us. As James says later in the 4th chapter, ***"humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift YOU up."*** (James 4:10) Just as a child is dependent on his/her parents, relying on the confidence that they are loved, protected, provided for, so too must we dependent on our loving Father, confident of His love, protection, and providence. In the words of Dwight L. Moody, who could be both reassuring and challenging, *"God sends no one away empty except those who are already full... of themselves."*

My friends, let us not equate 'humility' with 'weakness.' Being a Christian is NOT for pansies! (Like getting old is not for wimps) ☺ All of us want others to think of us, in the words of James, as ***'wise and understanding,'*** but are we willing to strive for those 'quality traits' that he describes: ***"do not be boastful and false to the truth... (bearing NO) envy and selfish ambition... (but) peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy."*** (James 3:14-17)

I don't know about you, but I can do pretty well on a number of these... not boastful, not too much selfish ambition, pretty peaceable... well, at least when I'm not in traffic... which brings us to that 'willing to yield'... and 'full of mercy'... and being 'full of good fruits.' And 'Without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy'...? Hmm... I guess that's why I resonated with a statement by Baptist minister and author John Piper: *"Every good thing in the Christian life grows out of humility. Without humility, every virtue and every grace withers. That's why Calvin said humility is first, second, and third in the Christian faith."*

As I pondered this issue of humility... of how important it is to humble ourselves before God as little children... I was really searching for a meaningful way to close this message. So, I did what any self-respecting writer would do. I got away from it. I went for a run with our daughter Catie on Saturday morning. You know, there's nothing better for one's creativity than getting out in the 90* heat to sweat for a couple of hours. ☺ But, we all know... 'God is good... ALL the time!' (Even in high 'humility' and killer heat indexes!) And as I ran in downtown BR, down that beautiful rolling oak-tree shaded street of North Blvd., I came across an unusual monument. It was a bronze bust erected in memory of a young man named **Trevor Sims**. Trevor... who obviously knew his way around video games, since he was called "The Minecraft Genius"... had his life snuffed out just a few days after his 11th birthday by cancer. Toward the end of his battle with that beast, Trevor was asked if he had one last wish. And his request was not a trip to DisneyWorld, or a new videogame player, or to parachute out of an airplane. His response was that he wanted to feed the hungry, because he didn't want anyone to experience the hunger that he and his family had. He was quoted as saying that *"You can make a difference every day. All little things count."*

Since its inception just 5 years ago, the "Trevor's wish" foundation has provided hundreds of thousands of meals for families in the B.R. area... in no small part because of one little boy. One young man who had the humility to put the needs of others ahead of his own. As you and I consider how God is calling us to be His servant... as we think about what it really means to be 'great'... let us remember those words of Jesus: ***"Whoever becomes humble like a child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."*** (Matthew 18:3-4) Let us remember the words of a young boy wise beyond his years: *"You can make a difference every day. All little things count."* In the name of the One who makes EVERY 'little thing count'... the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit... all of God's children said, 'AMEN!'

CHARGE/BENE

"If you plan to build a tall house of virtues, you must first lay deep foundations of humility."
(Augustine) **"Pride must die in you, or nothing of heaven can live in you."** (Andrew Murray, missionary to S. Africa and son of a Presbyterian minister)