

October 29, 2023
Laity 2023
Hudson United Methodist Church

Humility

Philippians 2:3-10, Matthew 21:28b-32, Matthew 22:36-40

(Read Philippians)

By Barbara Hill, North West District Director of Lay Servant Ministries

The theme for Laity 2023 is “All the World Needs Our Witness.” Trust me, the World really does need our witnessing in the name of Jesus Christ, but how easy is it for each of us to discern what the Lord really wants each of us to do?

I believe that there are several important steps we must take first to prepare ourselves for a life of witnessing. The first is to unpack or declutter, then we must release the stress in our lives and finally reach a level of humility that will allow us to hear and discern His will.

About a month ago, I spent 3 days at our daughter’s house outside of Kansas City to help her declutter. All the children are out of the house and it was then that she decided to go through all that had accumulated over a 20 year period. It was a big decision for her to make, but she was ready. So we started in the cellar. I brought out boxes and she went through everything and put them in one of three piles: memorabilia, donations and trash. The memorabilia was put into tubs and labeled and put in the corner of the cellar. The first day we took two car loads of donations to the local thrift shop. The second day, we took another load to the thrift shop. Needless to say, they were happy and so was my daughter. The basement was back to normal and she said to me that prior to this she was very stressed. Now she can focus on work and her life. The third day, we focused on the shed outside. We pulled everything out and swept and blew the dirt out and I caulked the perimeter of the inside to keep critters from coming in. We loaded a trailer with two 4 wheelers that didn’t work and a bicycle and other items to take to a county clean-up they have twice a year. By the time we were finished we had loaded that trailer twice. As I said earlier, it was an accumulation of years of saving. Only when it was all finished was she able to breathe a sigh of relief and move on with her life. She had to physically and emotionally empty a large part of her life to be able to focus on what is important in her life. Don’t we all have

to do that? What is really important in our lives, material things or God? That question is so relevant in today's society.

In a reading from Philippians 2:3-10, the Apostle Paul says, ***“Let each of you look not to your own interest but to the interests of others.”*** Then he goes on to say that Jesus ***“emptied himself taking the form of a slave...”*** But really, how easy is it to empty or declutter our lives both emotionally and physically to become less stressed and eventually achieve a state of humility which is what we are all called to do? Jesus had to let go to be humble in the site of his Father.

One of my favorite hymns is **Humble Thyself In The Sight of the Lord.** (FWS p.2131)

How can we become more humble in our lives today?

I was curious and found that there are 12 steps listed by Billy Graham to become more humble.

1. Routinely confess your sin to God (Luke 18:9-14) Continue to pray to God daily and ask for forgiveness when you have sinned. We are not perfect, but we must acknowledge our sins and confess them to the almighty.

2. Acknowledge your sin to others (James 3:2, James 5:16) Don't be afraid to tell others that you have sinned. Don't dwell on the sin either. Let it go and continue to live for the Lord.

3. Take wrong patiently (1 Peter 3:8-17) Typically, our first reaction is to defend ourselves, but Jesus is saying that we must continue to do right even if we must suffer for doing right. ***“It is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will than to suffer for doing evil.”*** Vs 17

4. Actively submit to authority..the good and the bad (1 Peter 2:18) This one is tough for me personally because if someone is over me that is not a good person, such as one who is demeaning and demanding and not willing to listen to reason, my tendency is to react. But this verse says we are to accept authority from all.

5. Receive correction and feedback from others graciously (Proverbs 10:17, 12:1) The Message bible says. *“If you love learning, you love the discipline that goes with it---how shortsighted to refuse correction!* Well said. Amen

6. Accept a lowly place (Proverbs 25:6,7) This clearly means to choose not to be at a place of honor or in the spotlight, but to choose to be in the background and wait to be promoted by God. Mother Teresa of Calcutta is a prime example of this step. Yes, she was famous, known all over the world for the work she did, but not once did she allow herself to be prominent. She continued throughout her life to be in the background waiting to be promoted by only God. No one else.

7. Purposely associate with people of lower state than you (Luke 7:36-39) This reading is of the anointing of Jesus' feet by the woman who had sinned. The Pharisees did not understand why Jesus allowed this sinful woman to anoint his feet, but Jesus knew completely and this woman is an example for all of us. Again, we must humble ourselves to all as Jesus did.

8. Choose to serve others (Philippians 1:1, 2 Corinthians 4:5, Matthew 23:11) Personally, I have always felt the desire to serve rather than to be served. In my profession, my role was to help coordinate services for babies birth to three with disabilities. That was a service that was a true ministry for me. I am always willing and waiting to be shown the next step in the mission process.

9. Be quick to forgive (Matthew 18:21-35) One thing I dislike more than anything and that is conflict unless it is to help defend a family member or church member. In this bible verse, Jesus is asked by Peter how many times do I forgive a brother or sister who hurts me. Seven? Jesus responds ***Not seven times seven, but seventy times seven.*** We must be very forgiving and it must come straight from the heart.

10. Cultivate a grateful heart (1 Thessalonians 5:18) So how do we cultivate a grateful heart? We must be cheerful no matter what; pray all the time and thank God no matter what happens.

11. Purposely speak well of others (Ephesians 4:31-32) This passage says that we are to put away any bitterness, wrath or anger and to be kind to one another, tenderhearted and forgiving. We must forgive one another quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave each of us.

12. Treat pride as a condition that always necessitates embracing the cross (Luke 9:23) The definition of pride is a deep pleasure or satisfaction derived from one's own achievement.... So I have to stop and think about how pride rules my life and focus on letting that go.

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But I would like to add another step towards humility and that is in Matthew 22:37-40. *"Love the Lord with all your heart and with all your mind... and then love your neighbor as yourself"*.

All these steps make sense to me and this is a good guide for my life, steps I need to work on to achieve my personal goal of being a humble person. I must continue to remember who is in charge of my life-God is and I must always praise him. And the most important command is to serve others. Serving others is fastest way to humility.

In step six, I used the example of Mother Teresa of Calcutta and I would like to share a personal story about her. I was fortunate to be able to see and hear her in person when she came to Memphis, Tennessee to speak on behalf of the Missionaries of Charity. We were all in a colosseum the size of the Target Center in Minneapolis and when she walked across the colosseum to the stage, I was stunned. She was so tiny and frail looking as she followed all the priests and others in a procession. She walked with her head bowed and her hands held in prayer.

When she came to the podium to speak, her voice was soft, but clear and we could hear a pin drop in the building when she spoke. She talked about humility and how it impacted her life as a nun and all the work she did for the poor. One of her most famous quotes is:

“Humility is the mother of all virtues: purity, charity and obedience. It is in being humble that our love becomes real, devoted and ardent. If you are humble nothing will touch you, neither praise nor disgrace, because you know what you are. If you are blamed you will not be discouraged. If they call you a saint you will not put yourself on a pedestal.” St. Teresa of Calcutta. Good Catholic

I have read many books about Mother Teresa and she has always been my idea of one who exhibits true humility and suffering for the Lord. Did you know that she often questioned the Lord? She would cry out to the Lord to show her the way, just like we do when we ask the Lord for guidance.

Matthew also talks about a father who asked both sons to go work in the vineyards in chapter 21:28b-32. One said he would not go, but he did and the other son said he would go, but did not. Jesus asks us the question “Which of the two did the will of his father?” The answer is the first. The one who said he would not go, but did. Jesus then gives the example of the tax collectors and the prostitutes who believed and listened to John and followed him. Those are the people who will be received into the kingdom of heaven. (*Matt 21:28b-32*)

How many of us hesitate when we are asked to do something and perhaps have even said “no”, but after some thought followed through? We must be willing to follow our Lord even if we are hesitant, we still must follow him unconditionally. Is that your goal in life? It should be if it is not.

Jesus’ Great Commission written in the Message Bible says: ***“God authorized and commanded me to commission you; Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I’ll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age.”***
Matt 28:16-20

We are here on earth to follow the will of the Lord and to spread the word to all who will listen. We must comfort the sick and those who mourn, feed the hungry and search for the lost sheep. Just as Jesus did, we must do. He is our example for a life of unconditional love and service to God. My heart aches for those who

do not believe, who are just existing from day to day with no guidance and without the love from the Lord. I know the Lord is grieving also for those who ignore Him and do not want to follow him.

My message to you this day is to be willing and open to let go of unnecessary “stuff” that prevents you from focusing on what the Lord wants you to do. Save what is important, recycle what is not and throw away the trash. And as you take each step forward in an effort to declutter, humble yourself a little more each day with the goal of being open to serve our Lord and Savior anyway He asks us to. Jesus is your role model.

Amen