

Humbled by Christ | 2 Tim 4:6-8, 16-18; Luke 18:9-14 | LUMC | Oct 23, 2022 **By Rev Grace Kanake**

Dear family and friends: Last week's preacher, Greg Smith, (LUMC conference lay leader), preached about prayer. What a great sermon we had! Thank you, Greg. That sermon reminded us to be persistent in our prayers, seeking the presence of God, the one to whom we bring our needs. We were reminded that it is God's prerogative to answer prayers: the scripture informs us God may answer prayers immediately, He may delay answering prayers, and He can refuse to answer prayers. Nevertheless, we must pray, utterly depending on God to answer our prayers God's way.

The biggest human hinderance to prayers is our insistence that God must answer them to our satisfaction, and He must not delay or refuse to listen and answer our prayers. Often human beings make God a puppet and a pet to control. This sermon reminds one of the two persons who wanted God to do their bidding.

I had a school mate who prayed to God to pass his national high school examination. He unfortunately failed. He was angry with God and turned his back on the church, accusing it of preaching and supporting "a dumb and deeply mean God".

Another person was a youth who read the verse that says, "If you have faith as little as a mustard seed, you can pray for a mountain to be moved to the sea and God will do that."¹ She sat near a mountain and prayed for the mountain to be moved to the sea. When she opened her eyes, the mountain was still unmoved. A couple more times she prayed and commanded the mountain to move, each time assuring herself that it would. Finally, she gave up and blamed the Bible for lying. Friends, that was the last time she attended the church!

Believing and having faith in what one believes in may lead to answered prayers.

In today's readings, Jesus narrates a parable of two people, comparing their praying methods and their conduct during prayer. Jesus contrasts these two people; one person's behavior and method of prayer resemble that of the Pharisees. Elsewhere Jesus describes the hypocritical Pharisees who go through the motions of prayer, yet do not really speak to God.² In his long narrative, this Pharisee expresses his moral standards, his religious adherence, and considers himself better than the other people. This Pharisee speaks arrogantly about the other person. He accuses the other person of not following religious traditions, and for living an ineffective religious life.

The other person who is the subject of our sermon does not compare himself to others; instead, he meditates and reflects on his sinfulness. He appears before God sensing his total unworthiness. He cries out, asking God to have mercy on him, a

¹ Luke 17:6; Matthew 17:20

² Matthew 6:5

sinner. In total dependence on God to forgive him, he says “I am worthless; have mercy on me, oh God, my rock and my salvation!” He *knew* his sins made him worthless and he did not amount to anything before the eyes and ears of our gracious God.

Turning to the crowd, Jesus praises the action and behavior of the second person (the tax collector), and affirms that such a spirit of self-humiliation and sincere repentance appeals to God. This tax collector must have gone home feeling forgiven. From the parable we learn that God is on the side of the humble. God exalts those who humble themselves, and He awards their humility with a better³ life on earth and in eternity.

Regarding humility, Jesus is addressing our intellectual abilities—how we deal with our lives, and the state of our moral conduct. Humility moves us to trust God and listen to other people’s viewpoints. It encourages us to give room for prayer, to listen and allow God to influence us.

Moved by humility gained by his encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road, and his years of mission work, St Paul advises Timothy—and us—on Christian behavioral standards, the church order, genuine leadership, and the place of women in the early and modern church. St Paul tells Timothy that Christians should live by the power of example, modelling their faith in the examples of Jesus and St Paul.

St Paul’s ministry rose from a humbling experience from the day he met with Christ on the Damascus Road on his way to kill Christians. St Paul, aware of his past unchristian life, often reminded Christians how his life changed to becoming a humble being. When he became a Christian, St Paul abandoned his pride of being a Jew, his bragging of having the best education learned at the feet of Gamaliel, his highest leadership role as a member of the Sanhedrin⁴ He belonged to the high echelons of the society. These are human achievements St Paul warned genuine Christians to be aware of. Unbelieve can lead us to “live in our heads”, and block God from being in our lives.

You have often heard people saying: “I can do this”, or “I know that more than you do”, or “I do not need any help; I know what to do!” It’s true we can do, and have done, a great deal, and will continue to do so, but the goal is to the praise of God, not ourselves. When it becomes *our* achievements, it blocks genuine humility. *Humility* takes this human self-praise away and allows God to work even more fully in us.

When St Paul became a Christian, he relearned to respect other human beings despite their backgrounds. He learned to let God lead him and let others live. St Paul’s

3. I use adjective term “better” life because we are not excepted from strives of life like illness, or sometime failure to achieve our destined goals, yet our life is better (superior) compared with life of those who do not know neither serve God.

4. Sanhedrin was the group of 70 elders that acted like supreme court of the Jews manned by the Pharisees and Sadducees. They made all community decisions. Although this team is extinct, some Jews wish to revive it.

parting words confirm his testimony. He fought a good fight and was still fighting right up to the end of his life.

Humble people have no room of boasting because God satisfies their needs and takes away the reason to boast. St Paul struggled to live his faith in a hate-filled world. He compares our journey of faith with athletes competing against each other. The fight with malevolent spirits compels us to stay on the course of humility, and we will always win.

We want to live a humbling life, aware that if we choose to violate the teachings and charges of Jesus, St Paul, and Timothy, we anticipate God's assured consequences. I am sure we all know our faith is tested when it comes to morality, leadership, love, hard work and genuine living within our Christian principles. We want to strive to behave ourselves according to the tenets of the Bible.

There are lessons in these readings to behold: What St Paul learned from Jesus he conveyed to Timothy, his adopted son who became his son in faith before he died. He offered Timothy directions to follow for those who will believe in the Good News.

Perhaps we might also want to charge others to live humbling lives before we pass on. How about including something about our faith in our last will? I would warn my future descendants against racism, pride, hatred, and judging others without sound evidence. I would ask them to believe in God, and prove to them how faith made me who I am—humbled by Christ's teachings to the end.⁵ I sense Paul encouraging us to have a place for our Christian faith in our final wish-basket that we transition to others.

I know very few Christians who shared with me before passing on how they wished to be remembered in matters of faith and Christian living. It seems that very few people pass their religious materials on to their family or friends. Most people emphasize how they want family to share property and live peacefully.

The Bible defines humility as an appropriate posture we ought to have with God. When Christians or people of God maintain a humble attitude, we reveal our dependence on God, and not ourselves. Most theologians maintain that humility refers to a lowly state of a person's being, the inferiority of station or status rather than our craved superiority posture we often wear toward others.

I have learned from most Christian writers that "God through Jesus Christ encourages humility because the term produces mental desperation and encourages total and complete dependence on God. When we depend on God, our inner ability sets a stage for a higher level of faith that activates miracles". How I pray we may realize the term humility, desperation (being pressed between a rock and hard place, or hitting

⁵ I have seen real estate covenants written, "Never sell this house to black person", or similar phrases. My faith cannot let me pass on hatred or pride. I would legally remove this from the record before I die. Our faith must humble us to make lasting solutions where we have power to do it.

rock bottom) are closer cousins. I have gone through the thick-and-thin of life, and most incidents made me discover that humility is an offshoot or outcome of desperation.

The greatest gifts of humble people are awareness of themselves; they know their strengths and weaknesses; they care about other people's feelings and often they are uncomfortable with the blame game; they value others and easily take in advice if it does not violate their standards and principles. When stressed they take a break and remove themselves away from the stressors. They retain beneficial relationships that do not strain their faith's journey. They are curious. They appreciate others and return thanks. They often speak their mind and make difficult decisions with ease.

The wisdom described in Proverbs 3:5 summarizes the meaning of the term humility. We must have faith that God will lead us in the best way of living. God through Christ will teach us how to avoid temptations. Or, if we get tempted, we return to God through genuine repentance like the tax collector in the parable. Humble people put their complete trust in the Lord. Humble people reflect a sincere and holistic life and are not deceived by worldly vanity and their lust. Amen.