



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

7643 Huron River Drive

Dexter, MI 48130

734-426-8480

Connection! Humility

August 17, 2008

Dr. Matthew J. Hook

Mark 10:43 - 45

Okay, the whole idea of preaching can be weird. Here's a good definition of awkward: preaching about the spiritual discipline of humility. "I'm glad you're here this morning. Now, let me tell you all about how to be humble. I've got it all figured out!" ☺

I appreciate humility. I just don't want to be *humbled* enough to *have* it. I want to *be* humble. I want to serve Jesus. The problem is, I don't really want to serve anybody else. Maybe you've seen how much that stinks too, having to serve people

- who aren't even grateful,
- who have no appreciation for how hard it is to keep the household together,
- who have no idea of how hard it is to stay positive about your work,
- who have no idea of how hard it is in my shoes.

I mean, look at all the stuff you do that leaves you humiliated, rather than humble. So I just say forget it. "Jesus, you be the humble one, I'm too busy worrying about myself to mess with that."

Have you ever noticed some people find it hard to be humble because they're so busy focusing on being *right*? Or putting *themselves* first? Or the opposite: They're busy worrying about what *other* people think (of *them*), worrying about their humility, about their future, basically *about themselves*. In either case: those who put themselves out there and those who don't, the focus is on themselves. When you focus on how great you are, or when you focus on how great you're not, it's still *you* you're focusing on. Whenever you focus on *yourself*, you're drawn away from others, including God. And if all you do is go around crying "Poor Baby" about yourself, that's all you'll ever be!

That's the whole problem with humility, and I think it's hilarious: As soon as we think we're humble, we're not! The truth is, genuinely humble people are inattentive to their humility. They don't even think of themselves as humble. As a matter of fact, they rarely think of themselves at all. They're too occupied with the well-being of others to guard their own interests or self-importance. (Love your neighbor as yourself, Jesus said).

The first bit of good news. The Bible says you can cultivate it. You can grow in it. It's not just something you're born with. It's a spiritual discipline. Jesus Himself said "*whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*" Mark 10:43-45

First, it's hard to talk about discipline because discipline is something great men and women exhibit behind closed doors. It happens away from cheering crowds and NBC commentators. And have you noticed that disciplined people are almost always humble? They don't need the applause to feed their hunger for excellence.

- We love great music. We admire great art. We envy the coordination and skill of great athletes. But we easily forget that it's the discipline we *didn't* see that made them so good. We try to emulate them on

the stage, or the arena, or the stadium. We don't often try to emulate them in the gym, or the practice room, or the studio.

- What's true of musicians, artists, and athletes is just as true among people seeking to live like Christ. If you see someone with their spiritual life reflecting Christ, you can be sure that person cultivated the disciplines of godliness. Lots of little decisions all in the same direction. Suffering through hardship, learning to rely on God. Yielding to the spiritual disciplines because she finds life works better that way.

Paul encouraged Timothy *"Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness."* 1 Timothy 4:7. Godliness, being like Christ, has one important difference when compared to music, art, and athletics. Unlike those pursuits, godliness has no public performance in mind...especially when it comes to humility. If anyone else notices, it's incidental.

Look in your Bible. It's interesting the disciples were humble and humbled enough to tell this story on themselves: *"The disciples and Jesus came to Capernaum; and when He was in the house, He began to question them, "What were you discussing on the way?" But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest. Sitting down, He called the Twelve and said to them, 'If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.'"* Mark 9:33-35.

They kept silent because they knew better. He had just said *"If anyone wishes to come after me, he or she must deny themselves, and take their cross and follow me."* Mark 8:34. And in less than one chapter the disciples were building themselves an audience again. They still didn't get that Humility (and every spiritual discipline we pursue) means performing for an audience of One. Our whole *purpose* of looking at spiritual disciplines this summer is to connect with God. Intimacy, simplicity, silence & solitude, surrender, prayer, and now humility. Here's the thing about humility:

In our pop psych age, let me say it again: Humility is *not* the result of having low self-esteem. Some people only focus on how low and terrible we are. Now it's true we're nothing apart from Christ. (There are no perfect people allowed!), but those negative thoughts don't nurture *humility*. They nurture *inferiority*! Jesus didn't mess with that. He never struggled with insecurity. Truly great people recognize their gifts as just that—GIFTS. From a loving Creator. And they use them in Christlike ways of service. And they're grateful. From now on, think of your gifts as that: gifts. God is the one who blesses. So be great. *Deflect* credit to your associates. (And to God?) *Devote* much of your lives to the *lowest* people: the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed. You can do it no matter how you feel, because...

Humility comes from (a place of strength and) inner security. Genuinely humble people who have a desire to seek the well-being of others are generally very secure people. Think about it: most people who turn around and help someone else were recipients once. They themselves were helped in the same way. They know how to do it, because they were on the receiving end. And because Jesus came, lived, and died for you, when you put your faith in that, you realize you too have "been served." You know how to do it. And it translates into actions that can be observed. Then why is it still so hard? Listen to what happened just a little while later, after Jesus explained greatness again, just one chapter later in Mark 10:35-45. James and John ask *"Master, grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory."* But Jesus said *"You don't know what you're asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"...You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But not so with you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."*

I love the disciples. We give them a bad rap. But I'm thankful for them and for their stupid questions. Because I have those same questions! James and John wanted to serve Jesus. (They thought it would be when He overthrew the Roman occupation of Israel). They weren't entirely wrong. They wanted to keep

Jesus in His rightful place. They just didn't want to serve anyone else! ☺). That's us isn't it? It's hard enough to submit to Jesus, who's perfect. But giving up our comfort or position or time or resources for the sake of a fellow human being who might abuse his or her authority is far tougher!

In Jesus' kingdom, it's not first come, first served. It's suffering that gets the reward. Not selfish suffering. But *selfless* sacrifice. The world doesn't need more "look-at-me's". They're everywhere, including youtube. Today, **the world longs for authentic, humble servants**. Pray to be that. Then drop it! Forget about yourself!!!

Humility grows out of gratitude. And what prompts it? For me, it was the 3rd verse of a hymn we sang at my grandpa's funeral:

- *"On the old rugged cross, stained with blood so divine a wondrous beauty I see for t'was on that old cross Jesus suffered and died to pardon and sanctify me..."*
- And then I feel gratitude. God humbled Himself to go where I was supposed to go, in order to win me by that. Is that Humility? Yes. Love? Yes. Crazy? You bet.
- I hear veterans who say "I'm not the hero. My friend who was killed is." And they can tell you about that guy. Eisenhower said it shortly after Germany's surrender in 1945: "Humility must always be the portion of any man who receives acclaim earned in the blood of his followers and the sacrifices of his friends."
- A heart filled with gratitude cannot be anything but humble.
- Contemplate the cross. In it, every fault and failing is taken care of. When you look at the cross, you can't defend any of those parts of yourself that you normally do. That God Himself would do that for you and me should bring us to our knees, bowing low in humility.

Philippians 2:3-4. *"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."* So, humility is acting like a servant. How do you know if you're growing as a servant? Easy. Just see how you react when you're treated like one.

What difference does humility make? It increases your faith. **Humility is an ultimate act of faith.** Because, if you're putting others ahead of yourself, you can't do it unless you have faith that God genuinely cares for you. If you have *that* kind of faith, then you can afford to focus your full attention on meeting the needs of others because you know that God will care for you. Don't worry if evil seems to be getting the upper hand as you humble yourself and obey God. This week don't promote yourself. Put your faith in God. Look for opportunities to serve: not just the glamorous ones, but the lowly ones. And imagine a church, a community where everyone knew 100 people who were better than they were, and treated them that way...

Study Guide

Monday: Review your sermon notes. Read Mark 10:33-45. If you had been James & John, how would you have felt about Jesus' response? What values did Jesus turn upside down in this conversation? How do you find yourself wanting to be first in Jesus' plan? Pray for a specific and lowly way to serve someone today...

Tuesday: Philippians 2:4-11. Reflect on what happened when you served someone yesterday. Were they even aware? If it didn't go well, did you maintain your servant attitude? How does Jesus' life as a servant influence your view of spiritual power? Ask yourself honestly: Am I into "upward mobility" or "downward mobility" like Jesus was. Ask God to help guide you to walk in Jesus' footsteps.

Wednesday: Read John 13:1-17. What do you look for in a leader? That they are tolerant? Motivated? Courageous? A self-starter? Why did Jesus wash the disciples' feet? How did Jesus expect them to follow his example? Why don't people in the church regularly practice the equivalent of footwashing? What would it look like today for you to serve someone in this lowly of a position?

Thursday: Read 1 Peter 5:5-7. Read each phrase several times. The word for *clothe* comes from a noun referring to a white scarf or apron typically worn by slaves. Perhaps Jesus' footwashing came to his mind.

Next, Peter quotes Proverbs 3:34. Do you feel at odds with God, or humble enough to enjoy His blessings? How has God humbled you? And finally, why does Peter say cast “*all anxiety on Him, because He cares for you?*” Does it have to do with humility as an expression of your faith? Can you truly focus on others and not be anxious about yourself, trusting in God?

Friday: Don't read anything! Take extra devotion time today and go surprise someone by caring for them, meeting a specific need, or engaging them, making it all *about them*. Try someone in your home, try a neighbor, try a stranger, and a coworker. Serve them and try not to be noticed!