

## BE GREAT IN HUMILITY



### *Scripture:*

### **James 3:13 - 4:3, 7-8a**

<sup>13</sup>Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. <sup>14</sup>But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. <sup>15</sup>Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. <sup>16</sup>For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. <sup>17</sup>But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. <sup>18</sup>And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

<sup>1</sup>Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? <sup>2</sup>You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask.

<sup>3</sup>You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures.

<sup>7</sup>Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup>Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

### **Mark 9:30-37**

<sup>30</sup>They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; <sup>31</sup>for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.” <sup>32</sup>But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

<sup>33</sup>Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the way?” <sup>34</sup>But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest.

<sup>35</sup>He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” <sup>36</sup>Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, <sup>37</sup>“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

**This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!**



## BE GREAT IN HUMILITY

I have to say, really? Was Jesus really that composed and patient a person that after he tells his disciples about his future involving being betrayed and killed, all they do is start talking about which one of them is the greatest? And he puts up with that? I am surprised Jesus didn't say, "Instead of twelve disciples, I have twelve self-centered egotistical narcissists following me!" Thank God, Jesus forgives! This is good evidence he is God incarnate.

## THE BOOK OF JAMES

I have been preaching from the book of James these past few weeks. And today I am combining the gospel message with the passage from the book of James because together they paint a roadmap for us. James and Jesus (speaking through the book of Mark) tell us how we should be living in our personal lives and what our church should be doing in our communal lives.

You may recall that James is thought to be the younger brother of Jesus. The writing of this epistle would have been about sixty years after the death of Jesus. That means James would have been around ten years old when Jesus was crucified, old enough to have been greatly impacted by Jesus' life and his death. No wonder then that James became an important figure. Paul affirmed he was "the brother of the Lord" in Galatians 1:19 and he called James one of the three "pillars" in Galatians 2:9.

**The content of the book of James is directly parallel to sayings of Jesus found in the gospels, especially his Sermon on the Mount. Compare blessed are the meek, blessed are the peacemakers, blessed are the poor, blessed are those who hunger and search for righteousness with James' main message to be humble, peaceful, and to show faith in action.**

## MARK

Today's passage from Mark has a theme of humility, hospitality and servanthood and the James passage has a similar theme of humbleness. So I titled the sermon *Be Great in Humility* because our

country and we ourselves can be truly great only if we are humble. When our country won independence the representative government was modeled after the Scottish Presbyterian church with people nominated and elected to office to represent the congregation on what we call our Session.

## HUMILITY

Some of that history is found in a new book titled: *HUMILITY: An unlikely biography of America's greatest virtue* by David J. Bobb.

He says, "Humility is a virtue that often gets a bad rap," especially while living in an era that he calls "an age of arrogance." Humility is now viewed as a weakness and passive, while "greatness is viewed as strong and bombastic and energetic — anything but humble."

The author quotes Muhammad Ali who once said (when he was young and strong), "It's hard to be humble, when you're as great as I am."

## TWO BASIC QUESTIONS

So, the basic questions are:

- Is it possible to achieve greatness, but be humble at the same time?
- Are national greatness and humility mutually exclusive concepts?

The author, Mr. Bobb, is the founding director of the Allan P. Kirby Jr. Center for Citizenship and Constitutional Studies. He thinks that "humility is the indispensable virtue for the achievement of greatness," that "our greatest moments [as a nation] have been marked by humility," and that "our future should be informed by that past." Remember our nation started with a goal of religious freedom for all.

'American humility' is not an oxymoron. Humility was a virtue strived for in the past. Our founding mothers and fathers were avid readers of the Bible and some were even Presbyterians, including Benjamin Franklin.

## GIVE ME AN ANSWER

Cliff Knechtle in his book *Give Me an Answer*, talks about the connection between humility and truth telling. He writes: "We all either try to hide our bad sides or we try to make them look good. But deep inside we all know that we fall short of living the way we know we should. No one can escape the charge of "hypocrite"—no one except

Jesus Himself. He is the only One who has lived up to God's standards; the only One who has perfectly lived what He preached. By living within the security of Christ's love and forgiveness, we are free to peel off the masks and to become real, honest people."

### **RUTH GRAHAM**

Ruth Bell Graham tells the story about a college student from India by the name of Pashi.

**Pashi told Mrs. Graham,  
"I would like to believe in Christ.  
We of India would like to believe in  
Christ, but we have never seen a  
Christian who was like Christ."**

**Ruth Graham consulted an Indian  
Christian friend, Dr. Akbar Haqq,  
before replying to this student.  
She asked him what might be the best  
response to Pashi's challenge.**

**Haqq answered, "That is quite simple.  
I would tell Pashi,  
"I am not offering you Christians.  
I am offering you Christ."**

In a blog called *Living on the Edge*, Chip Graham talks about how to fight hypocrisy and the internal desire for fame and fortune.

He suggests saturating yourself with Jesus, absorbing the mind of Christ into yourself. Chip emphasizes how you must immerse yourself in God's word and try to be Christ-like in all you do.

### **THE BIBLE**

Let's be honest. How many here have read the Bible recently? No judgment, just humble honesty. Who touched the living water even just a little bit in God's word this week?

I can think of some people who did this. Those who attended Presbyterian Women read it in the Bible study. Those who attended Wednesday night Bible study on *Eclipsing Empires* heard scripture as you watched the video. Those who were here in church last Sunday heard it read in worship and the hymns are created from the words in the Bible. All of that counts. Any effort to understand your faith is better than no effort. Watch Jesus Christ Superstar

or Godspell. Reading straight out of the book is good, too. Start with the book of Mark.

### **WHY GO TO CHURCH?**

After college I was often around doctors and research scientists who would occasionally ask me why I went to church and what did being a Christian mean to me? Sometimes they would comment that they didn't go to church because it was full of hypocrites. I wanted to say, "Don't let that keep you away. There is always room for one more!"

I'm a very curious person. When I became a certified Parish Nurse I learned how God's word and Christ's way of being in the world is a prescription for good mental health as well as spiritual and physical health, too. The goal of the Parish Nurse Health Ministry program is to promote an understanding of the connection between body, mind, and spirit. That led to me going to seminary where I was able to expand on that knowledge. (But still curious.) Then in the doctoral program, I did my final project on: *How Prayer Enhances Resilience*. And I am so grateful for the funding opportunity to keep going to school when so many now have huge school debt to pay back.

So next I'm running for office. Just kidding!

### **MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN BY BEING HUMBLE, GRATEFUL AND COMPASSIONATE**

But if my motto was, Make America Great Again, my subtitle would be: By Being Humble, Grateful and Compassionate.

Like Jesus, James taught a way of life that is peace-giving, merciful, humble, thankful and compassionate. Paul taught that same theme to the church in Colossae, too.

### **COLOSSIANS 3**

Our Presbytery leadership cohort group is reading Colossians 3 this year. Part of it says, "Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. <sup>13</sup>Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord\* has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup>Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. <sup>15</sup>And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful." (*Colossians 3:12-15*)

When you saturate your thoughts with these commands which describe The Way of Jesus and his philosophy for life there is no room for the competitive, envious, discouraging negative thoughts.

The Way of Jesus motivates us to want to find ways to help children and others in need in this world by being a friend to them as Jesus was. When we idly stand by and let the government separate children from their parents, we are not being their friend and we are not welcoming them as Jesus did.

### **THE LEAST OF THESE**

Besides children, those who are homeless are among “the least of these” who deserve our attention and respect. I have a handout about how to talk to someone who is homeless. It can be frightening to start a conversation with someone who seems so different. But some of the most fascinating conversations I have had with people have been with some women who were homeless.

Just as wine goes into the body and impacts every aspect of your thinking, your speech, your emotions, your immune system, and your liver, it is better to allow God's Spirit to saturate your soul. Humility comes easier then.

### **LIVE WHAT WE SAY WE BELIEVE**

But James doesn't ram Jesus down the throat of his readers. He just tries his best to show that following his big brother is the best way to get through life without conflict, striving, and discontent. James calls out the hypocritical, the boastful, those who pride themselves on having wealthy friends and show partiality.

James wants his readers to mature in their faith in Christ by living what they say they believe. James holds back nothing and that probably got him killed.

### **THE DEATH OF JAMES**

Jewish historian Josephus provides the earliest account of the death of James in a publication called: Antiquities of the Jews 20.197-203 (written in the year: 93/94) which would have been about thirty years after James wrote his letter.)

Josephus documents the difficulties Rome was having with its residents, which led to the invasion and destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. The historical record regarding James points to his

execution to be around AD 62, since Josephus places his death between two Roman procurators, Festus and Albinus. Upon the death of Festus, Nero appointed Albinus as the next procurator, but during the brief transition period, a high priest, Ananus, who felt threatened by James and his teachings seized the opportunity to have James and his companions stoned to death. Yet James' legacy lives on.

### **WEAVE HUMILITY INTO OUR LIVES**

We wonder how to weave humility into our lives and into the life of the church. When Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." Then we take that seriously and look to where we can serve more fully.

Jesus is always calling us to use our resources to bless others, to build up what we already have in the church so that we can share it even more generously to bring glory to God, to take risks, leave our comfort zones, and try new things, new paths, new ways to meet the needs of our community and world. May this fall kickoff of our church ministries be a blessing to not just our church, but for all our surrounding community.

Join us as we strive to provide great humble service!

### **Benediction:**

**May the Lord Jesus heal you of all illness from the top of your head to the tip of your toes, and saturate your heart and mind with His Holy Spirit!**

**And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen**



**The Rev. Dr. Cindy Alloway  
Presbyterian Church of the Roses  
2500 Patio Court  
Santa Rosa, CA 95405**