

The Grace of Humility

By Linda Rex

April 13, 2025, (Palm Sunday or) Passion Sunday—One of the ways in which followers of Jesus Christ are intended to live counterculturally is through humble service. Years ago, it was common for people in the community to be actively involved in service clubs and in helping out when there were community events. Finding time to serve others and our community can be a real challenge, with the demands of work, family, and church responsibilities crying out for our full attention.

Within one of the gospel readings for this Palm or Passion Sunday, we see Jesus sitting at a last meal with his disciples before his arrest in the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus has been painfully listening to a debate between his disciples regarding who will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. What was on Jesus' mind, that he had tried to bring to their attention, was that there was a person at the table who was going to betray him. But they were focused on positions of power within the new kingdom. It did not occur to them at all, even with Jesus telling them, the exact price Jesus was going to have to pay for them to be a part of the kingdom of God.

Jesus reminded them that as their rabbi and teacher, he was present among them, not as an oppressive, arrogant ruler, but as a humble servant. The one who served them was the greatest, not the one who was served. This was hard for them to get their mind around. He promised the twelve disciples their place in his heavenly kingdom, but pointed out to Peter his vulnerability to Satan. Apart from Jesus' intercession, Peter was headed for a great fall. Peter insisted on his faithfulness to Jesus, no matter what. But Jesus told him the truth—that in the moment of crisis, Peter would deny Jesus. Peter just could not see himself doing this (Luke 22:35–34). He did not have an accurate view of himself. He had not yet come to the place in his journey with Jesus that he realized his vulnerability to arrogance, pride, and self-sufficiency.

Peter had to come to a place of repentance—a turning around, a change in mind and heart. This came about as he came face to face with a humble, self-sacrificing Savior—the Lamb who went without complaint to the slaughter, on Peter's behalf, and on behalf of the whole world. As he denied Jesus the third time, Peter caught Jesus' eye, and the look on Jesus' face at that moment wrecked Peter's composure. He left the courtyard where he'd been hanging out while Jesus was being interrogated, and broke down in tears. Peter was never the same again. He had come to a true assessment of himself in the eyes of Jesus. And it hurt. But that's what true humility is all about—seeing oneself in the eyes of Jesus, as both having missed the mark and as having been forgiven.

This is the point the apostle Paul was making in our New Testament passage, Philippians 2:5–11. As God in human flesh, Jesus had every right and every reason to live as one who was in charge, the one who others must serve and whose expectations must be met. But this is not how we see Jesus. So often, he allowed himself to be at the mercy of the humans he created and sustained by the word of his power. While on earth, he allowed himself to be insulted, rejected, and wounded by those who should have respected and venerated him. He constantly served people, creating for himself a reputation of hanging out with sinners such as tax collectors and prostitutes. He paid his taxes to the current government of his day, and he, though brutally honest about their sin, submitted himself to the human political leaders presently in power.

The humility of the Son of God involved a self-emptying, as he took on our human flesh, setting aside for a time that which made him distinctly divine, allowing it to remain hidden during his time here on earth. We find the Son of God present in human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. He doesn't come as a conquering warrior, but as a tiny infant in humble circumstances—a baby in a manger. We see this Son of God, as the child of Mary and stepchild of Joseph, submitting

himself to his parents' supervision and instruction. We see him sitting at the feet of the ancient Jewish leaders, allowing them to teach him, even though he knew the answers and astonished them with his responses to their questions. His entire time here on earth was spent in humble service to others. And his final act of self-offering was on behalf of all he had made.

Jesus' assessment of himself was that he came as a humble servant, to serve others—and it was correct. He was truly human, the way every one of us was meant to be human. To have the grace of humility is to have, by his Spirit, Jesus living in and through us his own humility which was manifest in his life, death, resurrection, and ascension. May we turn our gaze towards Jesus, look into his eyes, and see ourselves with true and clear vision—both in how we miss the mark and how we are forgiven, accepted, and beloved. This is the grace of true humility.

Father, Son, and Spirit, when we look into the eyes of Jesus, we see how far short we fall from being truly human as you created us to be human. Thank you for giving us the grace of true humility, that we may serve one another in godly love. May we not only receive your forgiveness and acceptance, but also offer it to others in your name, Jesus, by your Spirit. Amen.

“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus ‘every knee will bow,’ of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Philippians 2:5–11 NASB

“The way Jesus saw himself is the only valid way to see yourself! His being God’s equal in form and likeness was official; his Sonship did not steal the limelight from his Father! Neither did his humanity distract from the deity of God! His mission however, was not to prove his deity, but to embrace our humanity. Emptied of his reputation as God, he fully embraced our physical human form; born in our resemblance he identified himself as the servant of the human race. His love enslaved him to us! And so we have the drama of the cross in context: the man Jesus Christ who is fully God, becomes fully man to the extent of willingly dying humanity’s death at the hands of his own creation. He embraced the curse and shame of the lowest kind in dying a criminal’s death. From this place of utter humiliation, God exalted him to the highest rank. God graced Jesus with a Name that is far above as well as equally representative of every other name; The name of Jesus endorses his mission as fully accomplished! He is the Savior of the world! What his name unveils will persuade every creature of their redemption! Every knee in heaven and upon the earth and under the earth shall bow in spontaneous worship! Also every tongue will voice and resonate the same devotion to his unquestionable Lordship as the Redeemer of life! Jesus Christ has glorified God as the Father of creation! This is the ultimate conclusion of the Father’s intent!” Philippians 2:5–11 Mirror Bible