

Sermon: **Humbly**
Text: Matthew 21:1-11
Philippians 2:5-11

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I'm drawn to a simple phrase in Matthew's narrative of Jesus' entry into the city of Jerusalem. It's a quote from the Old Testament prophet, Zechariah.

Your king is coming to you, humble, mounted on a donkey.

Matthew left out a phrase that Zechariah had included: "triumphant and victorious is he". It seems that Matthew is emphasizing a picture of lowliness, if somehow to present the triumph and victory that *is* lowliness in humble service; that *is* humility in self-giving love and sacrifice. He shows us the triumph and victory of Christ's self-giving love.

Your king is coming to you, humble, mounted on a donkey.

The people of Jerusalem were quite familiar with the triumphal entries of Roman conquerors returning to the city and had probably witnessed only days before, the arrival of the Roman governor Pilate. He would have come in the name of Caesar, proclaiming the supremacy of Rome. No doubt he had come with a cavalry of horses and foot soldiers with armor and weapons. It would have been a tremendous display of the imperial power of the Roman Empire.

But in decided contrast, counter to all the powers of earthly empires, comes Jesus, humble, mounted on a donkey.

Your king (triumphant and victorious is he) comes to you, humble. He does not come to us in any form of earthly power. Rather, he comes in radical humility.

Let's think a little bit, as best we can, about humility. Let me pose some questions.

How important is humility? How important is humility to human relationships? How important is humility to the arrangements of peace? How important is humility neighbor to neighbor? Spouse to spouse? Parent to child? Employer to employer? How important is humility nation to nation? Liberal to conservative? Progressive to fundamentalist? Democrat to Republican?

Eminence and exaltation without humility easily become dangerous arrogance. Power without humility can be deadly.

Humility is essential to reconciliation; to forgiving and being forgiven; to community; to peace and well being among people.

How important is humility in our relation to God?

How important humility is!

Old Church Father, Augustine, said. *Humility is the foundation of all other virtues; hence, in the soul in which this virtue does not exist there cannot be any other virtue... except in mere appearance.*

How shall we talk about humility? We'd all agree that humility is important, but it's hard to talk about, isn't it. It's hard to define. Look it up in the dictionary and it will tell you what it's not. Humility is "not proud or arrogant".

How can we evaluate or measure humility? It's is hard to evaluate and measure. How humble are you? On a scale of 1 – 10, how many of you score 5 or better; raise your hand.

How do we get humility? It's such an elusive thing. We've all heard it said that the minute you think you've got it, you've lost it. So how *do* you get it? How do you become humble? It is something you can decide to do? "Starting tomorrow, I'm going to be humble." Is it possible to be *intentionally humble*? Or is it something of a deeper grace and gift of God that is developed in us through experience.

Maybe a deeper question than how you get humility, is why do you want it? Careful! It's possible and often the case, that we feign pseudo-humility to be seen as humble... in order to impress others and draw them to us.

I decided not to title this sermon "Humility". In its noun form, it's an elusive subject and hard to define. I decided instead to use the adverb "Humbly". Adverbs describe what we actually do and the manner in which we do what we do. That's a lot easier for us to know and evaluate. That's where we can see humility.

And we see it best in the life, the actions, and attitude of Jesus. We see it in his incarnation when he emptied himself of all his divine prerogatives, lowered himself, taking on the form of a servant as one among us. He came to us, humble.

We see it in his life as he reached beyond himself to touch the untouchable and to associate with the underclass; when he stooped to wash the disciples' feet, teaching them and showing them his love.

We see it in his death, as his life is offered up for our forgiveness.

The best way I know to talk about humility is to talk about Jesus. We can see it in Jesus. His actions and attitudes define it for us.

Perhaps some good advice is this: Don't go after humility itself as something you can grasp or attain. You can't. Rather, let humility, the very humility of Jesus, define and qualify what you do, how you do it, and why you do it. Let humility direct your manner of life and all your relationships. "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus."

The only way I know for this mind to be developing in us is to allow ourselves to be humbled before God. The kind of humility we're talking about here is a Godly grace that is manifest in Christ-likeness.

The prophet Micah asks the question, *How shall I come before God and bow myself before God on high?* Answer: *He has told you what is good and what does the Lord require of you, but to love justice* (That's not simply about you, is it.), *to love kindness* (That's really not about you, is it), *and to walk humbly with your God* (That's all about God and how you live and relate to him).

Someone said, *Never humble yourself before anyone but God.* I think what was meant is this... If you truly humble yourself before God, it will manifest in how you walk with God, and that will manifest itself in every attitude and action and relationship in every aspect of your life.

That brings me back to Augustine. *Humility is the foundation of all other virtues; hence, in the soul in which this virtue does not exist there cannot be any other virtue... except in mere appearance.*

And that brings me back to that ancient creedal hymn cited by the Apostle Paul and recited by all of us earlier. *Let this mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself.*

He lowered himself, laid aside every prerogative of position and power that was rightly his... everything but love... and took the form of a servant.

Our king... the king of love... is the servant of all. He comes to us humbly, mounted on a donkey.

One last question: Why is all this humility stuff so difficult? It's difficult because it's so utterly radical.

The way of Jesus runs counter to the grand processions of the earth and all the great processions of empires and economies. He comes to us humble, and he calls us to join his procession in the triumph and victory of his love, walking humbly with our God.

Amen.