

Let us pray, to God our Father and Mother, our Creator and Redeemer.

May my words be a tool in your hands, O God, that together as your beloved community we may more closely follow the example Christ has shown us, in all humility. Amen

Most of you know me – a white settler born on Treaty 4 territory, descended from several generations of Russian Mennonites settler farmers; a queer, cis-gendered woman, a mother, a title holder now living on this territory governed by the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant. I tell you this because it positions me in the discourse that I want to dive into this morning. The *hope* that I need, that I see our world needing, is an end to oppression in all its many forms, with colonialism and white supremacy topping the list. As a white settler I name my privilege in this society and speak to myself and other white folks when I talk of the need for humility in race relations. And, I invite us all to consider the times when we are in a power position – be it due to ableism, agism, classism, sexism, homophobia, or any other form of inequity – and consider the role that true humility plays in taking a step closer to the just and loving kin-dom of God we are hoping for.<sup>1</sup>

Our theme this Lent has been Deep Calls to Deep and (as Jon has indicated) this is the sixth Sunday: Deep in the Current: Called to Deep Hope. Let us seek together the deep, steady current of God's steadfast love, beginning in Scripture.

We mark this day as "Palm Sunday" as you saw with the Children's Time and every year we recount 'Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem'. Earlier in John's gospel, Mary anoints Jesus, a large crowd gathers, and the chief priests plot to kill Jesus and Lazarus and the story continues like this:

**12** The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. **13** So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting,

"Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord—

the King of Israel!"

**14** Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written:

**15** "**Do not be afraid**, daughter of Zion.

Look, your king is **coming**, [movement, current]

---

<sup>1</sup> 'kin-dom of God' is a phrase originally coined by Ada María Isasi-Díaz to recognize the familial type of loving relationships and in contrast to the imperial implications of the phrase 'kingdom of God'

sitting on a **donkey's colt!**"

**16** His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him.

Do you feel the deep current here? Perhaps you feel the crazy conflicting currents on the surface - the eddies and whirlpools - mob-minded crowds, plotting clergy, a backdrop of unbending imperialism – in feelings not so unlike our own times with the crush of online mob-mentality, the plotting of political leaders, the backdrop of unbending colonial capitalism. The final verse gives us a clue to the deep steady current of God's love; I invite you to broaden your view. As much as Palm Sunday is just an island in the flow towards Easter, even John's gospel and Jesus' earthly life, marks but a moment in the current of God's love. We could go back as far as creation, but for today let's content ourselves with the reference in John to the prediction of Jesus' action. The prophet Zechariah (Zech 9:8-9) says,

**8**(Then) I will encamp at my house as a guard,

so that no one shall march to and fro;

**no oppressor shall again overrun them,**

for now I have seen with my own eyes.

**9** Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!

Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!

Lo, your king comes to you;

triumphant and victorious is he,

**humble and riding on a donkey,**

**on a colt, the foal of a donkey.**

Zechariah *hopes* for an end to oppression and the sign of it's coming is *humility* – "triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey." Not a war horse, not a chariot, not a litter...riding on a humble donkey.

Even while this is fulfilled in the Palm Sunday events, that is not the end of the story, nor will Easter Sunday bring us the end of the story. This current flows on. Do you know that there is only one other place in the Bible, other than John's gospel, that mentions holding palm branches? And it is not one of the other gospels the other mention of palm branches is in Revelation.

Revelation 7 says,

**9** (After this) I looked, and there before me was **a great multitude** that no one could

count, **from every nation, tribe, people and language**, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. **10** And they cried out in a loud voice:

“Salvation belongs to our God,  
who sits on the throne,  
and to the **Lamb**.”

A great multitude is there, together, in harmony – from every nation, tribe, people and language - together, in harmony – they lift their palm branches and cry out as *one* to God and the Lamb – not a lion or eagle or stallion – the Lamb. This is the humble one whom we follow. And this scene with the great multitude of all peoples is our hope, towards which God’s steadfast love is flowing.

Let’s add some depth to this metaphor by looking at what science can tell us about deep currents. The Oceanus website explains:

The [water] mixing in seafloor canyons—which happens on scales of inches—is being organized by the topography into powerful currents that extend for hundreds of miles. Swirling eddies spur mixing of water masses with different densities, setting up density gradients and converting kinetic energy to potential [energy] and back again. The motions at the smallest scales are tied directly to motions happening on the largest scales. And once formed, these canyon currents can cause more turbulence as they flow over more rough seafloor topography, thereby tying the large scales back to the small scales.<sup>2</sup>

In the ocean very small actions can set off a chain of reactions resulting in powerful currents that extend around the world. Keep in mind the scale and multiplying factor as we think about how we are part of God’s current of love and how the humility of a single person can change the shape of history.

When Lorenda and I announced that we would be facilitating a book study on Desmond Cole’s *The Skin We’re In* it gave me hope that more than 20 people were interested in looking at this book. Reading the book did not usually elicit hope in me. It is sub-titled: A Year of Black Resistance and Power. To be sure, I walked away with great respect for the certain black activists and organizations, but I didn’t walk away with an overall feeling buoyance or encouragement. A number of us – white folks - in the study, found that we did not know of all the horrors of racism and racial discrimination in our city and our country. For Cole to show the Black Resistance and Power he had to first explain what was being resisted and I, for one, found those explanations relentless. How much more so to live it! He organized the book around the months of a year, every month a new oppression, every month a plethora of

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.who.edu/oceanus/feature/powerful-currents-in-deep-sea-gorges/>

back-stories that explain how we got to the place where we are now. Every month the confirmation that, contrary to popular opinion, racism is not less of a problem in Canada than the United States, perhaps it is even more of a problem because white Canadians are very good at pretending it doesn't exist. Whether we read about it, live it, or ignore it racial inequality and racial discrimination is rampant in Canadian society and it drives us ever further from any notion of God's kin-dom on earth. Racialized communities, racialized individuals, have no choice but to live this reality every day. If you, like I, sport white skin, what are we going to do about it?

My first response is to read a book. Educate myself. Read another book. Now there is nothing wrong with education in and of itself. The issue comes when we think it is enough. The reading costs us nothing<sup>3</sup>. And alone it does not give us hope. Our hope is in Christ and in his example.

**5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,**

6 who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited,

7 but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,

**8 he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross.**

This was Jesus' calling and he fulfilled it brilliantly. When looking at this as an example for your own life, don't worry about the death part. Lucky for us, most people are not called to obedience that leads to death. Let's start at the beginning of verse 8, "humbled himself," the humility part is plenty hard enough. Yet that is what is going to get us to a place of standing with a Great Multitude from all nations. It is humility we need to break down the walls of discrimination and let God's deep current of love and justice *flow* for all.

Think with me about a few scenarios and imagine the difference humility would make.

1) In the lunchroom at school or work someone brings up a violent incident in the news and the reports that several black men were arrested. Others go on with

---

<sup>3</sup> "Becoming the Beloved Community: A Call to Transformative Discipleship," featuring the Rev. Michael Blair. March 5, 2021, Emmanuel College Gandier Lecture. Viewed at: <https://www.facebook.com/EmmanuelCollegeofVic/videos/2412661485546990> (at approx. 46 min)

colourful language about how those men got what they deserved. How do you respond?

2) You are a supervisor at work and one of your team comes to you in private and accuses you of racist language and actions. How do you respond?

3) As a volunteer you do some social media for a community organization. After a well publicized murder, you post a black screen with bold white letters saying, “Black Lives Matter.” You are surprised by the vitriol in the comments expressing that your words are hollow and meaningless. How do you respond?

First let’s look at what *humility* is *not*. It is pretty clear that humility is not, as Paul says just before today’s passage, full of conceit and selfish ambition. But we need to be careful from here. With Christ as our example, humility also does see oneself as worthless or bad. Humility is to see ourselves – and our neighbour – as God sees us. No higher and *no lower*.

In spite of the references to taking the form of a slave and regarding others as better than yourselves, I beg you to look carefully at humility and see that shame and guilt are not part of Christ’s humble example.

A settler friend told of his conversation with an Indigenous elder around how he wanted to be part of “Reconciliation.” She responded, “First you have to drop the guilt. When you are consumed by guilt, you are making this conversation all about *you*. It’s not about *you*.”

In a skill building workshop on inclusivity<sup>4</sup> I learned that if we are constantly apologizing, if we are focused on apologizing, we are not doing what else is needed. The facilitator also encouraged us saying, “The world doesn’t need you to be any less shiny, any smaller. You may need to be more fluid, more sensitive...more thoughtful and listening” but *diminishing* yourself serves no purpose.

If humility is *not* guilt, shame, constant apologies or diminishing ourselves, what is it?

First in the example Christ gives us, humility is an absolutely honest view of oneself. To view ourselves as God views us. Christ did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, rather he took on human form, humbled himself and became obedient. Human, humility and humble all have the same Latin root – “humus” meaning earth or ground.

The Franciscan priest and author Richard Rohr wrote:

Being human means acknowledging that we’re made from the earth and will return to the earth....As a human, I’m just a tiny moment of consciousness, a

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://animaleadership.com/training/ddo/>

tiny part of creation, a particle that reflects only a fragment of God's love and beauty. And yet that's enough. And then we return to where we started—in the heart of God.<sup>5</sup>

Eugene Peterson adds, "If we cultivate a lively sense of our origin and nurture a sense of continuity with it, who knows, we may also acquire humility."<sup>6</sup>

Cultivating a lively sense of our origin in the earth-humus and nurturing a sense of continuity with it, aligns well with Indigenous worldviews that I have learned about. These worldviews include a strong sense of the cycle of life, depicted in the four quadrants of the medicine wheel, each colour a stage: childhood, youth, adulthood, old age...and then the belief in becoming an ancestor. Every person has their place, each is important, but none is more important than another. This is also demonstrated in an Indigenous talking circle. People sit in a circle, because a circle has no beginning and no end. No one is above or below anyone else. Each is important, but none is more important than another.

Another example is when Indigenous people use the phrase "all my relations." It refers to all the people, animals, plants, earthly and heavenly bodies that are in relationship to each other. A person with this understanding would feel themselves to be as connected to a stream or a tree or an animal as they are to people. Ending a speech or note with "All my relations" is, I believe, like saying "peace" or "shalom" but not only offering this blessing the people they address, but also to all the beings and elements to which they are related in our interconnected world. All are important and humans are no more important than other beings in creation.

Understanding our place in the circle of life, understanding our place in any given situation, seeing ourselves as we really are, as God would see us, no higher and no lower than any other being, this is the beginning of humility. It is only then we see our unearned privilege for the invisible tailwind that it is and the undeserved discrimination for the headwind of adversity that *it* is. Systemic oppression will become visible to us and we can embark on the lifelong quest to dismantle this system.

In the second part of the example, Jesus teaches us that once we have humbled ourselves – taken on an utterly candid self-perception – then we need to become *obedient*. Not obedient to rules and texts, but obedient to God. The only way I know to understand what God wants of and for me, is to open myself to God in prayer. think of how much time Jesus spent in prayer from the 40 days, to the many stories

---

<sup>5</sup> <https://cac.org/participating-in-god-2017-08-02/>

<sup>6</sup> Eugene Peterson, Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places.  
<https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/48490-christ-plays-in-ten-thousand-places-a-conversation-in-spiritual-theolog>

where he goes off alone. Gratitude is a simple and valuable place to begin. This is why I wanted the Psalm read today. It is a psalm of gratitude. “You are my God, and I will give thanks to you.” Isaiah says, “The Lord God has opened my ear and I was not rebellious, I did not turn away.” (Isaiah 50:5) If we always begin with gratitude, we have a chance at the courage and vulnerability needed to hear God’s call and not turn away.

If I am thankful for the earth and the sky, the rain and the robin it becomes a pattern, a habit. When I spend time with God each day, then I am thankful for the people I like and the people I don’t like. Then I am thankful for the book full of “aha moments” I can read at my leisure and the chance to correct myself when someone calls me out for a racist phrase I used.

The course on inclusivity named four important skills to cultivate and one of them they called “mindfulness meditation.” This is the ‘practice of noticing our internal thoughts, emotions and body sensations without judgment. It’s that “without judgement” part that is really hard, but if we are trying to learn how to quite judging others through stereotypes and prejudices, we first need to be able to think about it in our own lives and bodies.

I find it is even more effective when we call it prayer - when I have a conversation partner in my heart, not just any partner, but the Source of All Love. There is no hiding from God. God knit me in my mother’s womb. God knows. I might as well be honest. The more time we spend with God, the easier it becomes.

The third aspect of Jesus’ example is obedience to the point of death – even death on a cross. As I’ve already said, I don’t believe that you and I are called to life-ending obedience. But that is not to say true humility will not be costly. The cost is to our ego. The cost may be in giving up power and privilege to understand ourselves as no lower and no higher than anyone else. Rev. Michael Blair, a black man, newly appointed as General Secretary to the mostly white United Church of Canada, talks about the problem with the language of allyship.<sup>7</sup> Allyship, in some understandings, means using my privilege to make space for an oppressed person. The problem is that I maintain my privilege. The structures and systems do not change. Blair used Martin Luther King Junior’s understanding of the Beloved Community to emphasize that all must come together as equals. Racism is not a problem for racialized communities alone. Racism is a problem for all of us and we must come together and solve it together. This will exact a price from those whose privilege and comfort is rooted in other people’s oppression.

---

<sup>7</sup> “Becoming the Beloved Community: A Call to Transformative Discipleship,” featuring the Rev. Michael Blair. March 5, 2021, Emmanuel College Gandier Lecture. Viewed at: <https://www.facebook.com/EmmanuelCollegeofVic/videos/2412661485546990>

There is a fourth aspect to the example we find in the Philippian hymn. After putting on humility, becoming obedient and paying the highest price, Jesus is exalted. I do not believe we will need to wait until the entirety of the Great Multitude is gathered holding their palm branches aloft, before we discover the rewards of humility. Even as King saw a microcosm of what he called the Beloved Community in civil rights movement gatherings that included people from all walks of life, so too will we find that as we act with humility, Christ's example ever in our minds, we too will find the joy of true solidarity, accepting our place among equals.  
Amen.