

“You Won’t Stumble if You’re Humble”

Luke 14:7-14

Series: The Experiment Week 3. Blessed are the humble

The Rev. Dr. Douglas C. Hoglund

The Woodside Church

May 19, 2019

Over his forty year career, Chan Gailey has been the head coach of the Dallas Cowboys, the Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets, and the Buffalo Bills. He’s served on the coaching staff of five other NFL teams. Early in his career, Gailey was the head coach of Alabama’s Troy State and they were on fire. With a 12-1 season, Gailey led the Trojans straight to victory in the NCAA Division II National Championship game. During the stressful week before the big game, Chan was on his way to the practice field when his secretary told him to come back for a phone call. In an irritated voice, Chan said, “Take a message.” She responded, “But it's Sports Illustrated.” “I'll be right there,” he said.

As he made his way to the building, he began to think about the upcoming article. It would be great publicity for a small school like Troy State to be in Sports Illustrated. As he got closer, he realized that a three-page article would not be sufficient to tell the whole story. Coming even closer to his office, he started thinking that he might be on the cover. "Should I pose or go with an action shot," he wondered. His head was spinning with all of the possibilities.

When he picked up the phone and said hello, the person asked, “Is this Chan Gailey?”

“Yes, it is,” he replied confidently.

“This is Sports Illustrated.”

“What can I do for you?” asked the coach.

“Sir, what we want to know is: do you want to renew your subscription?”

Coach Gailey concluded the story by saying, “You are either humble or you will be humbled.”¹

In other words: You won’t stumble if you are humble.

That’s a truth God repeats several times in His Word. Both Peter and James tell us:

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. I Peter 5:6

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. James 4:10

Jesus teaches this multiple times in the Gospels

¹ Chan Gailey speaking at a dinner in Dalton, Georgia (4-20-04)

For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. Matthew 23:12; Luke 14:11; 18:14

In case people didn't get the message, He gives us an embarrassing example:

When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this person your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. Luke 14:7-10

That's awkward. Recently Woodside Church was honored by Habitat for Humanity of Bucks County with their 2019 Spirit Award at their annual Hard Hats and High Heels Gala. Carolyn Gaul, Director of Mission, and I attended to receive the award on your behalf. I thought, "I'm sure they'll seat us at the front table where we can bask in the glow and admiration of Bucks County's elite and they can see how we are filled with SPIRIT! Well, when we entered the ballroom, I discovered we were not at the head table. So I started searching for our place of honor. I didn't find us at tables 1 through 5, we didn't make the top ten, the sweet sixteen or the triumphant twenty. I finally found my seat at table 22 against the far wall. Maybe God wanted to show me I wasn't full of Spirit but full of myself.

We all can use frequent lessons in humility. That's why Jesus made the third Beatitude:

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Matthew 5:5

That sounds like a contradiction in terms. In our world the meek get nothing. They are stepped on, dumped on, even jumped on. Today we might hear, "Depressed are the meek for they shall become doormats." The only thing the meek will inherit is what's left of the earth after the powerful are done with it. What if our 21st century culture could rewrite the Beatitudes? Brian Wilkerson says they might come up with a list like this:

Blessed are the good-looking, for they shall be on the cover of People magazine.

Blessed are those who party, for they know how to have fun.

Blessed are those who take first place in the division, for they shall have momentum going into the play-offs.

Blessed are the movers and shakers, for they shall make a name for themselves.

Blessed are the healthy and fit, because they don't mind being seen in a bathing suit.

Blessed are those who make it to the top, because they get to look down on everyone else.²

²Bryan Wilkerson, in his sermon "The Heartbreak Gospel," www.preachingtoday.com

But meekness? To many, meekness conjures up images of weak, wimpy, spineless creatures. Nobody's going to hand you your slice of the earth. It takes hard hitting, aggressive, cut-throat, take no prisoner tactics to claim your piece of the pie. The workplace, family arguments, school pressures, social media, international affairs - they are no place for the weak of heart and the meek of heart. "I don't want to be meek," some will scoff. "You have to be weak to be meek."

Well I've heard it said, "If you think it's weak to be meek, try being meek for a week." It takes a lot more strength to be meek than to be mean. A mean person uses strength to control others. A meek person uses strength to control oneself. We have misunderstood the meaning of the word "meek." The Greek word that is translated as "meek" in this beatitude does not refer to a weak, wimpy, whiny person. Rather, it refers to a gentle, calm, composed, self-controlled caring person. This is someone who is patient and able to endure injury without resentment. This is the word Jesus applies to Himself when He says,

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Matthew 11:29-30.

Jesus was meek but He was certainly not weak. He possessed all the power of God. Yet unlike us, He employed the power to do His Father's Will. Jesus says, God is with those who choose a gentle, humble, helpful lifestyle instead of a pushy, proud, power-hungry lifestyle. God is with those who control themselves instead of controlling others. For these blessed people make a difference in this world. They will inherit My Kingdom.' How can we cultivate an attitude of meekness in the true sense of the word? I suggest that there are three steps that will put us in God's will to inherit the earth.

The first step is Assess Your Needs. The place to start is to admit you need God. None of us wants to acknowledge we have weaknesses. But they are there. Old wounds that run deep and sting occasionally. Fears that steal up and haunt us. Worries that plague our minds. Damaged emotions and hurt feelings that we carry in our hearts. Bad habits that won't let go. Sins that we've committed or continue to practice. Painful memories that weigh heavily upon our souls. Needs. Weaknesses. We try to put up a good front. We cover up these deficits and defects. We fool the people around us. We say we don't need anybody. But we can't fool ourselves and we can't fool God.

Many of the Beatitudes refer to people who know their needs and seek God's help. "Poor in spirit" means that you recognize the poverty and emptiness of your spirit and turn to God for salvation. The "mourners" are grieved by the sin within and without. Those who "hunger and thirst for righteousness" long for and desire to do what is right in God's eyes. The first step to salvation and healing is to admit that you need it.

Lloyd Ogilvie, the former Chaplain of the US Senate, tells of a woman who came to see him. Tension was written on her face. "She was dependent on sleeping pills to rest and pep pills to make it through the day. Aggression was expressed in the way she attacked all her obligations and responsibilities. 'How do you learn to relax?' she asked urgently. 'I've become both hard and

harsh with the people around me. What am I going to do?” Ogilvie told her, “You have to draw apart or fall apart. Each day she would have to take time apart from her tension filled life. Each day she would have to surrender that day's responsibilities and pressures to the Lord. She would have to give up playing God over her life.”

People who assess their weaknesses, can turn to our Loving Father who supplies all our needs. That's the point of Psalm 37.

Do not fret because of those who are evil or be envious of those who do wrong; for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away. Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Psalm 37:1-4

Again and again David says, “Don't worry about what the wicked and evil people do. Don't play their evil games. God will take care of them. Instead, trust in the Lord, enjoy the Lord, follow the Lord, wait for the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.” The first step: Assess Your Weaknesses and Let God be God.

The second step toward the happiness of meekness is Assert Your Feelings. Another meaning of the Greek word for "meek" is a person who controls his or her feelings and passions instead of being controlled by them. That's what it means to be assertive. Most people think being assertive means dominating situations and getting what you want. In reality, assertive behavior is honestly expressing your feelings and standing up for what you believe is right without putting down others or stepping on their rights. An aggressive person forces their views and beliefs on others. A passive person bows to the wishes of others even when they don't agree. But an assertive person is able to express his or her own feelings while at the same time respecting the feelings of others. An assertive person can be angry without abuse and calm with being cowardly.

Consider this case study. See how you would respond. You are the parent of two small children. You see your in-laws frequently and enjoy their company. You are, however, annoyed that they constantly offer advice on how to discipline the children and have even done some disciplining themselves. You told them not to do this in the past. But during this visit, your in-laws just corrected your children for the third time since supper. You remind them again that you will take care of this but they say, “We've raised four children, and all of them have turned out to be fine adults. You should listen to our advice.” How do you respond?

A passive response would be to say, “I guess you're right,” while inside you vow to never invite them over again until Christmas, 2030. An aggressive response would be, “The next time you discipline my children, you can head for the door. And besides, who says your children turned out fine?” At which point your spouse, one of their children, kicks you under the table. An assertive response would be, “I appreciate your concern. However, these are our children and we will do the disciplining in our house. If you wish we can talk about this later after the children go to bed.” Aggressive people may win their way for the moment but they often lose family and friends. Passive people may avoid conflicts but they often hold in a lot of bitterness and resentment. Assertive behavior can be hard at first. But ultimately, it benefits you and those around you. Assert your feelings.

And finally, after you assess your needs and assert your feelings, Assist Your Lord. Jesus is looking for a few good men and women. Not to be chiefs, not to be generals, but to be servants - to help others. While making His final journey to Jerusalem, He said to His disciples, "In a few days I will be arrested and handed over to the enemy. They will mock me, whip me, strip me and then crucify me." And what were James and John's first reply to this terrible news? "Lord, can we have our thrones next to yours when you are King? Can we be your right and left hand men?" The remaining ten disciples began to argue with the brothers about who was highest in the heavenly pecking order. But Jesus cut them short. "No, no, no, you have it all backwards. On earth, the most important person pushes everyone else around. But in my Kingdom, it is the one who serves the most that is the greatest."

Jesus didn't just talk about serving. Jesus is the supreme model of a truly meek servant. Jesus had all the power and glory of God. But He laid His glory aside and took on the life of a servant. He was scorned and scourged but He never struck back. He was quiet and obedient as they led Him to His death. He could have called down armies of angels against His enemies. But He didn't. And just before He died, He breathed a simple prayer, "Forgive them Father." Is that crazy? Is that stupid? Is that weak? Maybe. But He inherited the earth didn't He? To this day, in every land, there are people who follow Him. Among every race there are people who kneel before Him. In every language there are voices who sing His praises. And one day, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. That is what One meek servant has done on this earth!

Jesus wants to unleash an army of humble servants on earth. You can join His movement. Here are five ways to start to be truly meek this week:

- Let the other person have the parking spot
- Say kind words to someone you find hard to like
- Compliment someone you envy, either in person or on social media
- Spend the whole week without raising your voice in anger. Resolve conflicts quickly
- Do something for someone who can't repay you.

You can help out with the Recovery worship service today. No need to sign up. Just show up here at 12:30 pm today and assist people seeking recovery from addiction with God's help.

And all of us can humbly serve our neighbors on June 1st by signing up for the Habitat Faith Build occurring right here in our parking lot starting at 8 am. Men, women, teens and children are invited to raise the walls of a house that will eventually go up on Woodland Avenue in Morrisville for Damian, Joanne and their two boys. Habitat for Humanity is built on the teachings of Jesus Christ. It proves that when humble servants come together to bless their neighbors they can unleash a revolution of good in our world. Habitat is not a hand out. It is a hand up. Every homeowner does exactly what I just taught you: they assess their weaknesses and get their financial house in order first, they assert their feelings especially their desire for a home of their own, and they assist the Lord by working hundreds of hours on their home or others. In so doing, Habitat unleashes blessings on this earth.

Take Tina for example. On the verge of finally buying their own home, Tina's husband Bob lost his job. They became homeless and the seven member family lived in a hotel for 6 months.

It wiped out their savings. Tina had overcome so many other obstacles. Her son Evan has special needs. She herself is a recovering drug addict, twenty-seven years sober. Tina even runs a mission to help children without parents. Yet this obstacle was impossible. Habitat came alongside her, helped her to save and budget and do the impossible. Through the humble work of many Habitat volunteers, through hundreds of sweat equity hanging drywall and carrying 2x4s by Tina and her family, they finally received the keys to their new home on Woodland Avenue in Morrisville just down the street from where our walls will ultimately go. Tina says,

“Today I can say I live a good life. I live a happy life. It’s life beyond my wildest dreams. I’m blessed.”

When you give to Vision – you are giving to help build homes and hope for neighbors like Tina. When you sign up to build the walls on June 1, you are humbly serving as Jesus did.

This week, try being truly meek.