

Sermon: July 7th, 2019- The Fruits of the Spirit -Humility

Last Sunday with the children, I spoke about Paul's description of the Fruits of the Spirit. Paul's states in his letter to the Galatians that the fruits of the Spirit are, "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self control." Now I would venture a guess that most of us try to practise those fruits of the Spirits as much as we can, but it is also very true that we often are better at practising some these then others and that none of us can practise all of these all the time.

Thinking about these fruits of the Spirit this week, I started to ponder how each of them was practised in our faith lives. I would suggest that as a faithful person every moment of every day is my faith life, there is no non faith life, but I also appreciate how we can perceive a difference between being patient for example while waiting on the line to talk to a costumer service representative and being faithfully patient. There are similarities I think and one absolutely should inform the other, but I think there is a difference between how we all might answer the two questions of, "How are you a patient person and how does your faith inform your patience?" The latter of those two questions is a bit tougher and what intrigues me the most.

I could rattle off a whole list of the ways I think I am a patient person, and I am sure my children could rattle off a whole list of why I am not a patient person, but to explain to you how my faith informs my patience, or teaches me patience, or gives me practical ways to live a patient life, well that is a lot harder. As I pondered that this week I decided to try and make Paul's exhaustive list of the fruits of the Spirit a little more palatable and so I narrowed his list into a list of five that over the course of July I will be speaking about in an attempt to answer those tougher questions, about how these fruits of the spirit inform our faith; and thus inform our lives. The five that I settled on are humility, compassion, patience, gentle strength and kindness. Now you might note that I have left out Love, joy, peace and faithfulness and the reason I did that was I truly think love, joy, peace and faith are the results of these others expressions; that when we are living, in our case to today, lives of humility, that we are then living lives with love, peace and joy.

I don't know about you, but whenever I hear the word humility, I always think of one song in particular. Maybe, if you know the words, you could help me sing it, "Oh Lord, its hard to be humble. When you're perfect in every way. I can't wait to look in the mirror. Cause I get better looking each day. To know me is to love me. I must be a hell of a man. Oh Lord it's hard to be humble. But I'm doing

the best that I can.”¹ Those of course are the opening lines of the Oh Lord its Hard to be Humble by Mac Davis. Mac presents us, in a jovial way, with one definition of humility, in fact the most common definition of humility, which is living a life free from pride or arrogance. Now I said it’s a jovial song, because as you know, Mac flips the script on the definition, in his song Mac talks about how arrogant he actually is and how because of his arrogance its hard to be as humble as he should be. But its still gets at the common understanding of humility which is that to be humble one must be meek, not arrogant and not prideful.

The word humility, which we often use as humble, comes from the Latin word, humilis, which in English translates as low. Thus, to live with humility has often meant to live a low life and in the English language we have corrupted the word humble, to not just mean low key, but to mean lesser then. For example, we sometimes hear phrases like, “She comes from humble origins.” Used in that phrase, the word humble often means that she, whoever she is, comes from a social standing that is lesser then and often looked down upon, by the one commenting. We also sometimes hear the word humble used in this way, “Welcome to my humble abode.” When used in that phrase the word humble, points to how unimpressive our home is, in comparison to something else. It also

¹ <http://www.metrolyrics.com/oh-lord-its-hard-to-be-humble-lyrics-davis-mac.html>

suggests that by not having nicer things or lots of things, that somehow, we are lesser than others.

We also from time to time, hear the word used in a slightly different way, when it used as a term of endearment. Sometimes you will hear about how humble someone is. Often this hints at the opposite of Mac Davis's song. It points out how impressive the person is, because of how they don't allow whatever they could be arrogant or pride filled about to go to their head, and actually remain on an even keel. Now by no means is that bad, but that way of using the word, continues to understand that there are different levels that we can compare against each other.

So given our normal uses, and what I would suggest corrupted uses, of the word humble, we tend to prefer to poke fun as Mac Davis does at a humble life, rather than redefining or attempting to live it. In fact, I know people who would be really offended if you called them humble, because even if I meant it in the endearing way, they would hear it as saying that they were somehow lesser than everyone else.

But as a fruit of the spirit Humility is defined biblically in a different way and its this way that I believe informs our faith and should inform our daily living. We have a great example of this definition of humility in our Gospel lessons for

today. In Luke we heard about how Jesus appoints and sends out seventy followers into the surrounding communities of which he hopes to visit. And he gives them very specific instructions, which is to take nothing with them and to not view themselves as entitled to anything other than what is offered to them. There is this really great instruction which is when you come to a town and someone offers you a place to stay, stay there the whole time, don't move from house to house. The ultimate point of this trip to heal, teach and to share how the kingdom of God has come near; and even when they are rejected, they are not to respond harshly, or to call down wrath, but instead are to remind that community that God's Kingdom is close; thus effectively do the same thing they did as when they were welcomed.

If you look closely, and take the definition of humility into play that we are familiar with, what we start to notice is that being humble, according to Jesus actually means that we see everyone on a level plane. Think about this for a moment in regards to the instruction of where to stay. Really moving from house to house, or table to table should not be a big deal, right? Imagine with me that you are one of these seventy. You and your partner arrive in a town and at first people are skeptical of all that you are and represent. They likely, at this point had heard of Jesus, but they are not certain that he is any different than any other

preacher like person who had certainly visited their town before. And yet one family welcomes you. They offer you place to rest and give you food to eat. While you stay with them the rest of the community begins to see the good works that you are doing and other people begin to offer you other places to rest and other food to eat.

It would be very easy to upgrade what originally was offered to you. The more work you do the more attention you draw and soon, because its human nature, you and your partner become almost like celebrities, and more and more people want you to stay in their home and to eat their food and so they begin to offer incentives. In the original home you were offered the food that the family was eating, but next door they are offering steak and baked potatoes, the next place prime rib. You see what happens? What happens is that you would become almost more intent on getting the best of everything and likely would get caught up in the celebrity and forget why you were actually there.

But Jesus' request to the seventy is to stay in one place. Accept the original welcome, he says and focus your mind and energy of the work, rather than yourself and status. What Jesus does with this rule and others like it, is that he defines a humble life as being able to see everyone on a level plane, because the kingdom cannot be bought by better food and more comfortable pillows.

Essentially biblically speaking, humility, is the ability to see everyone as children of God regardless of everything. Jesus reinforces this point when the seventy come back, because, as anyone would be, they are really pumped up about all the good works they have done and power they have; but Jesus reminds them not to rejoice or to become pride filled in their ability, not to rejoice that even the demons listened to them, but instead to rejoice and to have pride that the Kingdom of God was witnessed in their works to all, not just to those that are on a certain level.

I don't think that Jesus didn't want those seventy, or us today, not to have pride in what we do; instead what I think was Jesus point, is that by having pride in the Kingdom of God, rather than just the work we do ourselves, it is then that the work of God is done. And by doing so we change the narrative of humility away from being about who is lower than, to a life in relationships on a level plain with all of God's people. I was talking with someone about this sermon on humility this week and they said to me Adam, preach what you like but at the end of the day there are different levels in society whether you like it or not." Which is true and maybe I'm an idealist, but My response was to ask, "what difference is there really between any of us, if you take away all the structures, and material stuff that we have created?" "If you take away wealth, prestige, entitlement and

power, what difference is there really between us? To those question they didn't have an answer. Simply because aside from those things that make us us, we are more the same then we are different.

Friends to live with humility, means not that you are lower than or have less, but is that you see neighbour as yourself; not better than or lower than, but the same. How this then informs our life is huge, because to live humbly means that seeing every person as yourself, you couldn't ignore the needs of another. It means you couldn't allow another to go hungry when you had food to share. It means you wouldn't separate people and lock people away, simply because they look different or are striving to live a better life. It's about seeing first another's humanity rather than perceiving a threat. It would change everything we do and say. All of our politics, our religions, our commerce, really everything in society would change, if we all saw every living thing as being on the same level that we stood. It may seem idealistic, and you can laugh it off and say well that will never happen. But as faithful people, we cannot ignore that this is way that Jesus sent seventy followers out into the world to show what the Kingdom of God looks like. In way Mac Davis was right, Oh Lord its hard to be humble, but we really need to do better then we have. Living a humble life, is a life lived showcasing the Kingdom of God; which means that it is a life lived responding to the needs of

those who are no better or worse than you and I, rather than creating levels so that we can ignore that all to real need. May it be so with us all. Amen.