

**Why the way of humility is worthwhile**

Phil 1:27-2.18

Yesterday I opened up the employment section of the SMH,  
not because I'm panicking too much about our financial situation,  
but because I wanted to see which personal qualities  
are valued in today's economy.

You know how when you read a job advertisement  
they will describe those attributes required in a suitable candidate?  
I figured it's one measure of what we value in a person.

So I read the first couple of pages of job ads and this is what I found:  
The most common characteristic: *experience*.  
By far this was the most common word.  
Experience in classroom teaching, project management, pouring concrete.  
(Ironic given that one complaint about the job market  
is that it's hard to find a new role once you're in your 50s).  
Employers are also looking for *skills*, this was the second most popular word.  
Employers want to know you can do the job.

Now, today's passage from Paul's letter to the Philippians  
is all about one particular characteristic,  
one that received no direct mention in any of the job ads.  
Big business asks about your experience and skills,  
The Bible asks about your humility.

The closest any of the ads came to speaking about humility  
was when they spoke about the ability to work in teams.  
One ad spoke of the need for interpersonal skills,  
and humility helps with those things  
but I doubt that many HR departments  
would be actively looking for humility as the foundational quality.

There are some people in our world who actively speak out against humility.  
Here's a quote from Muhammad Ali, the great heavyweight champ:  
"At home I am a nice guy. But I don't want the world to know.  
Humble people, I've found, don't get very far." (x2)  
He's a man who's honest enough to admit that humility carries a cost.

Or in more recent times:  
"Show me someone without an ego and I'll show you a loser"  
Do you know who said that? (x2). President Donald Trump!  
There's no room for humility in the Oval Office!

But is there room for humility in our church here in Waitara?

I hope so, because Paul sees this as an indispensable part of church life.  
 He speaks at length about the place of humility in the church  
 The model of humility we have in Jesus Christ,  
 and also why it's a valuable characteristic for a church like ours to possess.  
 Others might despise it, but Paul gives us reasons to treasure it!

Let's hear from Paul again,  
 and we'll pick up his comments from the beginning of Philippians ch 2.  
 Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,<sup>2</sup> then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.

Paul knows the church in Philippi pretty well, he knows all their strengths  
 and he's delighted to see these guys make great gains in the Christian life.  
 But there is one area that he wants to see them work on.

Reading these first two verses I was reminded of *Masterchef*.  
 I look forward to watching Masterchef when it returns to TV soon,  
 And what often happens is that the contestant will present her dish before  
 the judges—Matt, George, and Garry—and these are nice guys; not only are  
 they judges but they're also mentors for the contestants.

And they'll list all the things the contestant got right:  
 The pork belly was cooked to be nice and tender,  
     the green vegetables were not overdone,  
         the presentation was immaculate with a good choice of plate,  
             but the special sauce was not smokey enough!  
 And you get the sense that Garry George and Matt  
 really want the contestant to get the sauce spot-on the next time around!

I get the feeling Paul is having a similar conversation with the Philippians.  
 There's lots they get right  
 —they are comforted by Christ's love,  
 developing tenderness and compassion—  
 but, they could work a bit more on their unity  
     thy could be a bit more willing to overcome those disagreements  
         that can crop up in churches from time to time.

In a few weeks we'll hear Paul address this issue explicitly,  
 but for now he's content to encourage the Philippians to be of one mind  
 To have the same focus and the same desire as a church  
 to be working towards the same goal,  
 to not be distracted by petty and unimportant arguments.

And a key step in achieving this is for each member to work on their humility:

Verse 3: Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,<sup>4</sup> not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

You can see the connection between unity and humility, cant you?  
 When you're not so intent on pushing your own agenda  
 and when you have a genuine interest in where others are coming from  
 then it is going to be much easier to work together.

What's important in these verses is Paul's definition of humility:  
 It's the valuing of other people's interests above your own.  
 Being humble is not the same as being quiet.  
 Being humble does not mean that we must always remain in the background.  
 Being humble does not mean you should never put your hand up for a role.

In fact, valuing the interests of others may mean volunteering for something.  
 Sometimes we shy away from leadership roles here at church  
 Because we fear that people might think we have a big ego!  
 but providing leadership is a fantastic way that we can serve others.  
 What actually matters is whether you're leading for your own glory  
 or for the benefit of those around.  
 I know that sometimes it's hard for others to tell the difference  
 but you'll know the difference and so will God and that's all that matters.

The model for this kind of humility is the Lord Jesus.  
 Was Jesus quiet and content to sit in the background?  
 Of course not, he gathers a team  
 and together they seek to achieve the mission set by his Father in Heaven.  
 Was Jesus humble. Of course he was!  
 And Paul reminds us how this humility was demonstrated:  
 Verse 5: In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:  
<sup>6</sup> Who, being in very nature God,  
 did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage.

For many people verses 6-11 is a favourite passage from the Apostle Paul.  
 This is the *Christ Hymn*  
 possibly an early song of praise that Paul would have sung in church.  
 And in 6 verses it tells the entire story of God the Son.  
 In verse 6 Paul starts with the pre-incarnate Son,  
 the second member of the Trinity before he became one of us.  
 Paul has us picturing the Son, up there with the Father and Spirit:  
 The three of them having the same nature,  
 The three of them, equal in their 'God-ness', equal in their divinity.

But the Son decided that this privileged position  
 was not something he would insist upon,  
 not something that he would use to his own advantage.  
 And so he leaves that seat at the table.  
 He never leaves his divinity behind, he never stops being God.  
 But what does he do?

Verse 7: rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant,  
 being made in human likeness  
 He gives up heaven to become one of us.  
 It's a bit like when young royals leave their comfortable lifestyles  
 to spend their gap years painting orphanages in Bolivia, sleeping on the floor,  
 they never stop being royal, but they do enter into a different experience

Now, living in Sydney in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a pretty comfortable way to live,  
 But any human existence is going to be a step down from Heaven,  
 let alone the existence of a poor middle-eastern family in the 1<sup>st</sup> century.  
 But this is the reality that God himself stepped into.

But while this first step is incredible in and of itself,  
 The self-demotion of Jesus didn't stop there:  
 Verse 8: And being found in appearance as a man,  
 he humbled himself by becoming  
 obedient to death  
 God the Son, by his very nature, is eternal.  
 He was never born, and he would have never experienced death,  
 except that as he took up our human nature  
 he also subjected himself to the curse of human death.  
 now that's really letting go of the privileges of being God,  
 to go from one who lives forever, to one who dies.

But not only that,—even death on a cross Paul adds at the end of verse 8.  
 This was no peaceful passing away surrounded by loved ones and friends,  
 death by crucifixion was a publically humiliating  
 and obviously very painful way to die,  
 and I'm not sure he could have been  
 any further away from heaven as he was at that point.

Now what was driving him to do this?  
 Was it some perverse idea of glory through martyrdom?  
 No. He did it *for us*. His death was *for us*, to atone for *our sins*.  
 This is why Paul points to Jesus as the model for our humility  
 It's the ultimate example of placing the interests of others ahead of your own.

"But" you might say, "what about from verse 9 on?"  
 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
 and gave him the name that is above every name  
 "surely his humility gives way to his glory,  
 surely his humility finds a limit!"

Well, it's true that vs 9-11 tell of Christ's exaltation after his humiliation,  
 But there are a couple of things that indicate Christ's continuing humility.

First of all, note in verse 9 that it is God who exalts Jesus after his death,

Christ never exalts himself.  
He humiliates himself to the lowest point imaginable,  
but he waits for the Father to raise him and exalt him.  
It's not up to us to promote ourselves so we might receive praise.  
Leave that to God, if he wants to lead us into a situation  
where tongues acknowledge us then that's his business.  
But we don't orchestrate that ourselves,  
What we do is to follow Jesus in his deliberate self-sacrifice for others,  
and, apart from any action by God himself, that is where we stay.

Secondly you see in verse 11, all this is for the glory of God the Father.  
Even as the exalted Lord of heaven,  
Christ is not the only one being glorified.  
God the Father receives his glory for what he has done in Christ.  
Christ's eternal glory is something shared,  
not something he enjoys on his own.  
All this is to say that Humility is an *ongoing characteristic* of Jesus—he  
doesn't put it aside—and that's an approach that Paul would have his friends  
in Philippi imitate.

And there are some very good *practical reasons*  
why we in the church should seek after humility.  
This virtue has real value aside from the fact that it's Christ-like.  
To get a sense of how Paul wants to see humility at work  
We'll head to the margins of our passage.

First of all let's head to Ch 1:27, the very beginning of our reading  
 You remember Paul's logic: humility is important because it leads to unity,  
 Well, unity is important because it helps us cope with spiritual opposition.  
 Whatever happens, Paul writes, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of  
 Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know  
 that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel  
<sup>28</sup>without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.

What opposition might we receive?  
My guess is that *at the moment*  
the most serious opposition might be opposition we receive as individuals  
in our own contexts: hostile families, difficult workplaces and so on.

Unity is still important because  
we can cope with hostility  
if we know that we have a church community  
where we are all on the same page.

You can imagine how this source of strength  
can be undermined if church becomes a place of competitive egos.

Very quickly people will feel that they have no friends here,  
 and so in order to find friends somewhere  
 they'll start to compromise on what it is they believe in order to be accepted.  
 Strong Christian friendships are vital if we are going to stay the course,  
 And the practice of humility is a vital ingredient in creating these bonds.

And as we engage with the outside world,  
 acting with some humility might send a very positive message.  
 Head to the other end of our reading, ch 2:14  
 Do everything without grumbling or arguing, <sup>15</sup>so that you may become blameless and pure,  
 "children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation." Then you will shine  
 among them like stars in the sky <sup>16</sup>as you hold firmly to the word of life.  
 I'm reminded here of Jesus' words in John 13:35  
 Everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

Acting with humility is a very important part of our witness.  
 In a world where acting in your own self interest is the norm,  
 Acting out a life of service,  
     one where you don't grumble or argue,  
         this is a big way to make an impact.  
 It's not enough on its own,  
 at some stage Jesus needs to be spoken about rather than imitated,  
 but you cant really speak about him if you're not living like him, can you?

And it's attractive:  
 workplaces might not know they are looking for humility  
 but they'll like it when they see it.

Humility maybe a forgotten virtue but it is a powerful one;  
 it creates a really powerful ripple effect:  
 Not only does it help our witnessing  
 but it also leads to unity and friendship which helps with our steadfastness.  
 And at it's centre is a concern for others.

There's a great story I'll leave you with.  
 It's a story about the founder of the Salvation Army, Gen. William Booth.  
 The General was nearing the end of his life and he was booked to give an  
 address at the General Convention of the North American Salvation Army.  
 This was his final charge to the movement that he founded. The time came  
 and the general was too ill to travel let alone give an address, but he sent a  
 telegram. The convention chairman stood on the platform, telegram in hand  
 and opened it up ready to read the Generals final words to his movement.  
 The telegram contained just one word: *Others*. That was his message: *Others*.  
 It was a call to humility. Let's heed it here in Waitara.