

Deuteronomy 8:1-3
1 Peter 5:1-7

St. John's Presbyterian Church
Devon, Pennsylvania
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HUMILITY

He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. (*Deuteronomy 8:3*)

In the same way, you who are younger must accept the authority of the elders. And all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." (*1 Peter 5:5*)

Every English school child knows the story of the arrogance of King Canute who sat by the water's edge on the shores of the English Channel commanding the tide to recede which, of course, it neglected to do, finally soaking the King to the core. However I learned years later from the twelfth-century *English Chronicle* that this was not an accurate story. It turns out that the good King Canute was so tired of the fawning sycophants around him who were constantly praising the king's greatness, power and invincibility, that the king commanded that his chair be set down by the water's edge. Canute wanted to settle once and for all the issue of the futility of human power, and the incoming tide gratefully accommodated him. The chronicler then adds that, from this time, King Canute never wore his crown again but placed it, for all to see, on a statue of the crucified Christ.

First, I want to congratulate you all whom we have just newly installed as officers of the church and of the congregation. Your church family thinks very highly of you. Second, I feel compelled to charge you in the Spirit of Christ, and also with the expectations of your church family. Your position is not one of elevation. It is one of servanthood. Your position is first and foremost to be one of humility. Humility, however, cannot be chosen "so that" God will reward the self-effacing. Being humble to gain a desired end is a contradiction in terms. Rather, humility has as its consequences a spirit that naturally cultivates Christian *virtue*. The seed becomes what it is. That's an interesting word—virtue. I learned at our Inward Journey study last Thursday that it's the word that used to stand for power—not manipulative or coercive power but the power that emanates from sheer goodness. So when the woman who had been hemorrhaging for 12 years touched Jesus robe secretly, Jesus said "Who touched me, for I felt power [that is virtue] flow from me." (Luke 9:...)

1. There was a woman who approached Jesus in humility, which is a proper stance before the creator of the universe, wouldn't you say, one she believed had the power and the will to heal her.
2. Faith itself cannot reach out in trust without first springing from humility. Humility acknowledges that I am unfinished, in process, vulnerable. We know ourselves how it is almost impossible to benefit from instruction or good counsel if we don't desire to *own* what is offered.
3. So humility makes us teachable. For years after finishing college I repeatedly had a dream that I was still in college and would not finish the program. Jane and I were just three months married when I entered college in North Carolina. Having left secondary

school very early, I never in my wildest dream expected to go to college. It simply wasn't on the radar screen. So when the opportunity came, I soaked up everything like a sponge (with the possible exception of a year of accounting). I valued that education immensely—even more so than graduate and doctoral work, because it came as such an unexpected gift. And that made me very teachable and dedicated.

4. Humility opens the door to compassion. Vulnerability—“There but for the grace of God go I,” makes the heart tender to the needs of others, the ability to feel another's pain. There is no greater trait of Jesus worth aspiring to than compassion.
5. Humility opens the door to prayer, which is our intensely personal access to God. Your first task is not to lead these people, it is to be led by God by being faithful to God. When the people see the love of God reflected in you, they will want that for themselves. They will want to be led. Humility says, “Lord Jesus, I haven't a clue how to best fix this, or do that better.” Without access to God, how do you know where you're going? How will you get there? And how will you know when you have arrived? Without humility we cannot bring ourselves to ask and listen. Prayer begins everything. And the end of everything is to say “Thank you. Thank you Lord Jesus!”

Late last night this was as far as I got. But it did not have the sense of an ending. I had another thought, but it seemed a negative thought and I did not want to use it. So I prayed. Still nothing else came, so I went to bed. This morning I prayed again for another ending. Still nothing. I prayed on the way here in the car. Nothing. I prayed again before coming into worship. Nothing. Sometimes, the answer is the silence. So this I give you, which I believe is from God.

If you adopt the discipline of prayer, it will transform you; it will transform what you do here; it will transform your church. If you do not pray, no matter how hard you work and plan and strategize, nothing of consequence will happen.

Amen.