



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

February 1, 2015

"The Humility of Love" - How to Have Healthy Relationships Series

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I am honored to share with you today and I'm fired up to serve alongside Tim Shaw in the College-Age Ministry here at First Prez!

Our family moved to Hawaii last July so we are new to island living. We are missionaries with The Navigators focused on reaching and discipling college students. I've been at it for 17 years now. We spent the last 12 years living in Ohio and leading a ministry at Kent State University.

Unlike many of our friends in Ohio, we never planned or dreamed of living in Hawaii. In fact, when The Navigators asked us to move here to restart a ministry at U.H., our initial response was, "Thanks, but no thanks!"

At that point, we thought: It's too far away from our family and friends! It's way too expensive to live there! As full-time missionaries who raise 100% of our financial needs, it's way too hard to explain to current and potential ministry partners that quote "God is calling us to Hawaii."

But God had other plans for us. Plans that included selling our four-bedroom, 3,300 square foot house—a house that allowed us to host 80+ students for outreach events like Super Bowl parties; a house where many students came to know Christ.

God's plans included entrusting a campus ministry to another NavStaff member—a ministry that we started, which grew to 200 students attending weekly meetings.

God's plans also included having to raise more funds so we could afford to rent a small house (one-third the size of our old house) so we could live near U.H.

But the hardest part of following God's plans for us was moving so far away from family, friends and the many rich relationships we had developed in Ohio. We are so thankful for how smooth the transition has gone so far; but it has been a humbling experience.

As we continue our series on "How To Have Healthy Relationships" the topic today is: HUMILITY. Humility is crucial if we want to have healthy relationships. I like what C.S. Lewis wrote about the topic: "True humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less."

It's Super Bowl Sunday! If you were asked to describe today's sports stars, what words would you use? Powerful! Confident! Proud! Over-paid! But would "humble" be one of them? Probably not! In the sports-crazed culture in which we live, humility is a rare commodity. And most

sports fans, seeing the abundance of pride among modern athletes, have become numb to it.

However, humility is a serious calling, not something to be taken lightly. We are told, in a letter that the Apostle Peter wrote, 1 Peter 5:5, that "*God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.*" Being opposed by God is not a predicament in which any person should want to find himself.

Since it is Super Bowl Sunday I thought I would bring something with me to illustrate some Biblical truth about humility.

This is a football. And every football is designed to be inflated to a certain optimal range for game play (12.5 psi.) A football is considered unfit for play if it is over-inflated or under-inflated. Our egos are a lot like this football. What keeps us from being humble in relationships is that our ego is often over-inflated...we think more highly of ourselves than we should. Or under-inflated...we think less of ourselves than we should.

For me (maybe you can relate), my ego is often over-inflated until something happens that deflates it.

Case in Point: Many years ago, Emily and I attended a wedding reception.

The groom was a young man whom I had spent quite a bit of time with as I mentored him during his college years. He had graduated, landed a good job and had found a great Christian young lady whom he married earlier that day.

When we arrived at the reception, we found our table number and then went searching for our assigned table. At this time, all the tables were completely filled except for two of them. One was way in the front and the other one was way in the back. The problem was, neither of the empty tables had our numbers on them. Apparently, the staff had removed them.

I confidently escorted Emily to the table in the front and we sat down. Emily looked hesitant. But I assured her that this was the correct table. I said something like, "Isn't it great, that he recognized the impact I've made in his life and he placed us at one of the best tables in the room."

As we were sitting at the table by ourselves, waiting for others to join us, Emily said to me, "I think there's a parable about this." I was distracted because there was a lot of commotion as several people were approaching the groom and pointing our direction. Something wasn't right.

And, you probably know what happened next. The groom walks over to me and informs me that we had sat at the table intended for his immediate family and that our table was the one located in the back of the room. That is deflation!

As we were walking back to our assigned table, the words of Jesus from a verse in the gospel of Luke came to mind: "*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. ⁹ 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. ¹¹ For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." Luke 14:8-9,11

I've found that the real issue is not IF pride exists in your heart; it's WHERE pride exists and HOW pride is being expressed in your life.

John Stott says "At every stage of our Christian development and in every sphere of Christian discipleship, pride is the greatest enemy and humility our greatest friend."

We live in a very proud and egotistical world. It is considered acceptable and even normal for people to promote themselves, to praise themselves, and to put themselves first. Pride is considered a virtue by many. Humility, on the other hand, is considered a weakness.

Jesus repeatedly taught against pride. And through His life and teaching He constantly exalted the virtue of humility. Nowhere is that more clear than in and account of Jesus in the Gospel of John Chapter 13.

It is Passover, the day before Jesus' death, and rather than being preoccupied with thoughts of His death, He is totally consumed with His love for the disciples. Knowing that He would soon go to the cross to die for the sins of the world, He is still concerned with the needs of twelve men. He celebrates a Passover dinner with them. Look with me at John 13.

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ² During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, ⁴ rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

¹² When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. (ESV)

Why did anyone have to have their feet washed? It is likely that Jesus and the disciples had been hiding at Bethany during this final week before the crucifixion. Having come from there (or from anywhere near Jerusalem), they would have had to travel on extremely dirty roads. Naturally, by the time they arrived, their feet were covered with dust from the road.

1. The NEED for humility: Dirty Feet

Everyone in that culture faced the same problem. Sandals did little to keep dirt off the feet, and the roads were either a thick layer of dust or deep masses of mud. At the entrance to every Jewish home was a large pot of water to wash dirty feet. Normally, foot washing was the duty of the lowliest slave. When guests came, a slave had to go to the door and wash their feet—not a pleasant task. Even the disciples of rabbis were not to wash the feet of their masters. That was uniquely the task of a slave.

As Jesus and His disciples all arrived in the upper room, they found that there was no servant to wash their feet. Get this! Only days before, Jesus had said to the twelve, *"Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave"* (Matthew 20:26-27).

If they had given mind and heart to His teaching, one of the twelve would have washed the others' feet, or they would have mutually shared the task. It could have been a beautiful thing, but it never occurred to them because of their selfishness.

I had the joy of assisting with the baptism of my daughter Nora a few weeks ago at Magic Island. It was wonderful day for our family. But right before the special occasion, I found myself blinded by my selfishness.

Here's what happened. Emily packed our cooler full of food to celebrate after the baptism service. I loaded the heavy cooler in the back of our car and we were off to Magic Island. But none of us had been there so we were unsure where the best place to park was.

We found a parking space but it was quite a distance from picnic area. When it came time to get the cooler out of the car, I sent Emily to get it while I made sure Nora got to the pre-baptism meeting. About two minutes later, as I saw Emily making the long walk to the car, the Spirit convicted me. Why didn't I get the cooler? How could I be so blind to this simple act of love and service? I was blinded by my selfishness. When Emily returned, I apologized and said something like: "Pray that the Holy Spirit convicts me sooner next time."

2. The ENEMY of Humility: Pride

And here is the great lesson of this whole account: Only absolute humility can generate absolute love. It is the nature of love to be selfless, giving. In 1 Corinthians 13:5, Paul said that love "does not seek its own." In fact, to distill all the truth of 1 Corinthians 13 into one statement, we might say that the greatest virtue of love is its humility, for it is the humility of love that proves it and makes it visible.

Christ's love and His humility are inseparable. Jesus could not have been so consumed with a passion for serving others if He had been primarily concerned with Himself.

Jesus waited until everyone was seated. Then, in a stunning act of humility, He stood up, walked over and took the pitcher, and poured the water into the basin. He removed his outer robe, His belt—leaving Him clothed like a slave, put a towel around His waist, and knelt to wash the feet of His disciples, one by one...including Judas who had already decided to betray Him.

You see, for a fisherman to wash the feet of another fisherman is a relatively small sacrifice of dignity. But that Jesus Christ, God in human flesh, would stoop down and wash the feet of sinful men, that's the greatest act of humility. And that is the nature of genuine humility, as well as the proof of genuine love.

Love has to be more than words. The apostle John wrote, *"Let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth"* (1 John 3:18). Love that is real is love expressed in activity, not just words.

3. The SECRET to Humility: Serving Others

Notice what happened after Jesus finished washing their feet. He said to them, *"Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."* (vv. 12-17)

Jesus gets to the real point He is teaching His disciples: that they need to begin to operate on the basis of humility.

Notice that He argues from the greater to the lesser. If the Lord of glory is willing to gird Himself with a towel, take upon Him the form of a servant, act like a slave, and wash the dirty feet of sinful disciples—it is reasonable that the disciples be willing to wash each other's feet.

The visual example Jesus taught surely did more good than a lecture on humility ever would have. It was something they never forgot.

Peter didn't forget it. In his first letter he wrote: *"Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another.*

Jesus' humility is the real lesson—and it is a practical humility that governs every area of life, every day of life, in every experience of life. The result of this kind of humility is loving service—doing the menial and seemingly demeaning tasks for the glory of Jesus Christ. That demolishes most of the popular ideas of what constitutes spirituality.

Some people seem to think that the nearer you get to God the further you must be from people, but that's not true. Actual proximity to God is to serve someone else.

In terms of sacrificing to serve others, there was never anything Jesus was unwilling to do. Why should we be different? We're not greater than Him.

Do you want to have healthy relationships? Develop a servant's heart. We are to be God's servants and a servant is not greater than his master. If Jesus can lay aside His heavenly glory to become a man, and then further humble Himself to be a servant, washing the feet of twelve undeserving sinners, we ought to be willing to suffer any indignity to serve Him. That is true love, and true humility. The humility of love.

The gospel says you are more sinful and flawed than you ever dared believe, but more accepted and loved than you ever dared hope.

When our ego is over-inflated, we think more highly of ourselves than we ought. The solution is to humble yourself with the truth of the gospel—that you are far more sinful than you ever dared believe.

But what if you struggle with low self-esteem and your ego is often under-inflated? Perhaps you were bullied as a kid or you experienced a traumatic event like your parents' divorce. What do you do?

The solution is to affirm yourself with the gospel—that you are more loved and accepted than you ever dared hope. If you believe in Jesus, these five truths (like our 5 fingers) are true of about you. You are lovable. You are valuable. You are forgivable. You are changeable. You are never alone.

If you allow those truths to penetrate to the depths of your heart and you live them out, you will be free to humbly serve others even in the midst of the most difficult of circumstances.

Earlier, I shared a bit about how God brought us to Hawaii. What I didn't tell you was what motivated us to leave our big house, a large student ministry, and the many deep friendships we had in Ohio.

Why did we make such a radical move? We wanted to serve people, wash their feet, bring them to Jesus. Two things jumped out at us.

First, when we learned that The Navigators since 2006 have been trying to recruit an experienced staff couple to restart a thriving, reproducing ministry at

U.H. We knew that we must consider it.

The second and most compelling reason was this: When we realized that the University of Hawaii is the closest U.S. University to over half the world's population, we knew we had to come to Hawaii. My dream for The Navigators and for this church is that we would reach and disciple local, mainland and international students who will become lifetime laborers who advance the gospel to the nations.

Why did Jesus leave the comforts of heaven to come to earth? He had it all. Or did He?

What was the one thing Jesus didn't have in heaven? What was His motivation to leave it all? It was YOU. It was ME!

If HE was willing to wash His disciples feet. If HE was willing to go to the cross for us, we should be willing to humble ourselves and serve others in His name. I believe the more we are melted and moved by HIS humility toward us, the more we will grow in humility toward others. Let's pray!

Thank you Jesus for your amazing example of humility and love. Through the power of your Holy Spirit working in and through us, help us to live lives of humility and love as we relate to one another. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Note: Sunday sermon texts are also available at fpchawaii.org. The audio version can be downloaded from iTunes. You may also request the audio version by visiting: fpchkoolau@gmail.com