

# First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth, Michigan

## *Talking Points – Talking in Humility*

Sunday, November 1, 2020

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell

### **Rev. Emily Riley Campbell – Welcome and Announcements**

Good morning, and welcome to worship. Today is November 1st and we're so glad that you have tuned in to join us for worship today. Today is Saint Andrew's Sunday and on this Sunday we remember that our Presbyterian history began in Scotland. To honor that church history today, the bagpipes are here with us this morning. I'm extremely grateful to our Piper Dave Martin, not only for his skill and talent on the bagpipes, but rather than being here today in our empty sanctuary, he was willing to be filmed outside in the midst of God's beautiful creation.

Friends, before we get our service going today, I do need to remind you that next week is another special week in the life of our church. Next Sunday, November 8<sup>th</sup>, our candidate for the Associate Pastor position, Ashley Smith Ashley, will be preaching both online and live in our parking lot service. Now I have had several people ask me if Ashley is part of a "Pittsburgh conspiracy", bringing all people from Pittsburgh to serve as ministers in this church! Let me just assure you that although great things come from Pittsburgh, Ashley is originally from Whidbey Island in Puget Sound, Washington State. She grew up on a military base there, as her father is a retired naval aviator. Her brother currently is serving in that role, Ashley has been, for the last ten years, in Pittsburgh while she and her husband Brendan both received seminary degrees. Now we are blessed because Ashley is coming to us not only with a Master of Divinity degree but also with a Master of Social Work degree from the University of Pittsburgh. We are delighted that Ashley is coming--to be potentially a part of our church staff. Now Ashley cannot be called to this church to serve without a congregational vote. Given our separation from one another due to Covid, this meeting is particularly challenging. But I'm going to offer you three separate ways that you, as members, can vote next Sunday for our next associate pastor. If you are worshiping with us online, you can register to vote in our live congregational meeting taking place via Zoom at 2:00 p.m., next Sunday, November 8<sup>th</sup>. Members must pre-register to vote at this congregational meeting. You can do that online through our church website and if you are voting as a couple, you need to vote on two separate devices. Now on the day of the vote you'll need to log into your Zoom account first to join the meeting and then go to the link.

Now if you choose to come to our parking lot service at 10:00 AM next Sunday to hear Ashley preach live you can vote by paper ballot,. To attend this parking lot service you will need to register your vehicle in advance, which you can do by calling the church office or you can log in online and register your vehicle.

Finally, there is a third way for us to vote. If you watch the service online you can vote by phone between 12:00 and 2:00 p.m. next Sunday, November 8<sup>th</sup>. If you call into the church office, your call will be met by a member of the APNC and they'll take your name and your vote and once we verify your church membership then you can simply say "yes" or "no" and you can vote in this way.

Friends, I know this is all a bit unusual, but we are operating in unusual times. We appreciate your understanding, your flexibility, and your support, and even as we are apart we remain one family of faith. It would be wonderful to show Ashley how much we care about our church and its future by taking part in this special vote.

Friends, this morning I am grateful to Mark Hovermale, who's here serving as our liturgist. The 5th Season music ensemble will be featured during communion, providing us with music and I'm grateful for their talent. Thanks always to Susan Underhill for bringing all the parts of this service together.

### **Rev. Mark Hovermale – Opening Prayer**

We praise you, Lord, because you deserve our praise. In our worship we are humbled that we can come before you, both as individuals and as a community of believers, spend time with you and praise your name. Let this service give you honor and glory along with allowing us to get closer to you. We know we've messed up this week. We know we have done things we should not have done, and we haven't done things that we should have. Please forgive us for this, since we know you are full of grace and mercy. In your name we pray. Amen.

### **Rev . Mark Hovermale – Scripture Readings**

#### **Micah 6:6-8, New Revised Standard Version**

<sup>6</sup> “With what shall I come before the LORD,  
and bow myself before God on high?  
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,  
with calves a year old?  
<sup>7</sup> Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?  
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”  
<sup>8</sup> He has told you, O mortal, what is good;  
and what does the LORD require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God?

#### **Colossians 3:12-14, New Revised Standard Version**

<sup>12</sup> As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. <sup>13</sup> Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup> Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

## **Rev. Emily Riley Campbell – Sermon**

Would you all please pray with me. Holy God, you are compassionate, kind, humble, gentle and patient. Make us more like you, we pray, in all of these attributes. Speak to us today through your Word. May our lives reflect your grace at work within us and within your world. This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Friends, on this Sunday before the presidential election, I've had people questioning both my timing and my motives in preaching a sermon on the subject of humility. In one sense those who have questioned are right, for it is not by accident that this topic comes up now. But it may not be for the reason that you think. Thomas a' Kempis once wrote, "Be not angry that we cannot make others as we wish them to be, since we cannot make ourselves as we wish to be." Thomas a' Kempis wrote these relevant words in his book, "The Imitation of Christ," which was written sometime in the 15th century. Six hundred years later, these words remind us that none of us are perfect. Where it may be easy for us to pass judgment on who we may think is or is not humble, ultimately the only person we need to answer that question about is ourselves.

Scripture calls us clearly to clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Out of that laundry list found in Colossians, chapter 3, humility is perhaps the most challenging and difficult attribute for us to put on. As one country music star once memorably sang, "It is hard to be humble when you are perfect in every way!" Yet, as devoted followers of Jesus Christ, we cannot avoid this garment of humility or even a conversation about the issue. Scripture calls us clearly to live humble lives.

Micah chapter 6, which Mark read for us today, says at verse 8, "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

God's call to humility is not limited to these specific scriptures but is repeated throughout the whole canon of scripture. Today we can understand that call to humility in three specific ways. The call to humility often comes, first, out of reverence. Psalm 8 describes this reverence very well. It says there, "When I consider your heavens," the psalmist writes, "the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have set in place, what are mortals that you are mindful of them?"

Phillip Yancey writes God's glory was revealed to humanity at first through the glory of humility, for the God who came to earth did not come in a raging whirlwind or a devouring fire, but unimaginably the maker of the earth shrank down, down, down, so small to become a baby, a baby born in Palestine who could not speak or eat solid food or even control his own bladder but was dependent on a teenager for shelter, food, and love.

There are so many parts to Jesus, his life, his ministry and his death, that are marked by the glory of humility. If we hope to live our lives reflecting his love and grace then our lives should also be known for their humility, humility coming out of reverence.

But our humility is not limited to what comes out of reverence. Our humility also comes out of our reliance on God. We need God's help today. We need the Spirit's strength to help us in our weaknesses. We need the scripture's teaching to guide us when we are lost and confused. We need help because we are not God and yet we forget this truth.

At times when we lose sight of ourselves, we would do really well, actually, to follow the example of those who attend meetings for Alcoholics Anonymous. You may know that at a recovery meeting, the very first thing a person says when they stand up in front of the group is, “Hi, my name is . . .” my name is George, and I am an alcoholic. That really is just another way of saying, “Let me be very clear and honest with you from the beginning. I am not God.”

Humility is living within the truth about ourselves and the truth is that we are not God. We are not the center of the universe, we are not the center of our lives. We have needs that we can't control, and we can't always meet ourselves and having humility is not self-deprecating, but it's honest about who we are and about the needs of our lives. We are reliant upon God and that is humility.

Someone who clearly understood their reliance on God was John Newton. John Newton lived in the 18th century and he left school at the age of 11. In his own words, he became a rough, debauched sailor. Eventually when he became a sea captain he would capture natives from West Africa to be sold as slaves in markets around the world. One day the grace of God put fear in his heart when he encountered a terrible storm and in his desperation he began to read the book, “The Imitation of Christ,” by Thomas a’ Kempis, which is the book that I began this sermon by quoting. God used this book to lead John Newton to recognize his need and to change his life dramatically. John Newton left the seas and he went into ministry and at the age of 39 he became an Anglican minister.

In the Anglican church he wrote many of the hymns we still sing today and one that we will sing together at the end of today's service is “Amazing Grace”.

Amazing grace!  
How sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me.  
I once was lost  
But now I'm found,  
Was blind, but now I see.

John Newton grew to reflect the love of God in his life and that is yet another call for humility, for our humility comes from more than reverence and more than our reliance upon God. Our humility grows as a reflection of God's love and grace at work within us. Every time we sing the words of Amazing Grace and every time we receive the gifts offered to us at the communion table first set by Jesus Christ himself, our actions reflect the humility of Christ and the love and grace that claim us.

Singing this hymn and sharing in this communion meal are not the only way that we practice humility. We can practice humility everyday as we practice gratitude, and a good way to start living a humble life is by saying “thank you” for the whole of life.

This week in Vanity Fair magazine I read an article about Gal Gadot, who is that beautiful, statuesque Israeli actress who plays Wonder Woman in the DC Comic movies. I've always thought, as an actress, she seems very down to earth and I wondered, as a celebrity, how she's able to do that. She ended the article about her life saying every day she begins her day with this Jewish prayer: She prays Modeh Ani, which means “I give thanks.” Every day when she wakes up and she steps out of bed she says the prayer, “I give thanks.” She says thanks for everything. She repeated in the article, thank you,

thank you, thank you, the prayer said throughout her day. Nothing is to be taken for granted.

Friends, gratitude keeps us grounded. It also keeps us humble, because it reminds us that we've had help—help from God, help from others, to get through every single day. Beyond gratitude we can also practice humility as we read the Psalms over and over, allowing God to speak to us through every emotion and experience in life.

There are certain Psalms that I think help to grow that humble heart within us. One of my favorite Psalms that I believe does that is Psalm 139, verses 23 and 24 where it says,

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there's any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.”

In addition to that Psalm there is the beautiful humble cry of Psalm 51, where it says,

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, dear God. Take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and renew a right spirit within me.”

Friends, in addition to practicing gratitude and in addition to familiarizing ourselves with the Psalms on a regular basis, let's not also forget the call of Micah, chapter 6, verse 8. There we are told what God expects of us:

“What does the Lord require? God requires that we act justly, that we love mercy and that we walk humbly with God.”

I pray that we would walk humbly into the week ahead recognizing that although this is a week of great unknowns, for our church and for our nation and our world, we do not face any of these challenges or unknown futures alone. God walks with us. Instead of relying on our own strength, I pray that we would rely on the strength of God who humbled Himself for us. May our lives in this coming week reflect His humility, His love, and grace. Amen.

### **Rev. Emily Riley Campbell — Sacrament of Communion and Prayers of the People**

Friends, we've reached the point in our service where we come to God's table to share in this communion meal together. Right now in this pandemic, I'd ask you at this time to pause [the video] and simply go prepare within your own homes whatever items you may have that may work for communion today. Whatever bread, whatever cup might work for you, please come and bring it back to the table.

Friends, Jesus has said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 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.”

Let us now come into God's holy presence, as we turn to God in prayer. Let us pray. Gracious and loving God, as we come into your holy presence today, we do so recognizing that we need rest for our souls. We thank you, Lord, for your word and for the way that it speaks to us. We thank you that you have shown us what is good and what it is you require of us. Help us, dear God, to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly every single day with you. Today, dear God, we choose to walk humbly, relying on your Holy Spirit's leading. Help us, Lord, to hear your Spirit's voice prompting us to move forward in praise. Help us not to rely on pride or our own self-sufficiency but help us to

walk with you. We do thank you, dear God, that in all of life's transitions you do walk with us--ahead and behind, above and below. Help us to trust in your leading through all the changes in life, through all the changes in our church, and all the changes in our nation and world. We do pray for our nation in this upcoming election week. Please grant wisdom to every candidate. We pray for every individual running for office at every level. May they be open to the leading of your Holy Spirit, we pray. We pray for peace in our nation and peace in our hearts. We pray for an end to hatred, and violence or injustice. We pray that we would be moved towards peace, beginning in our hearts and within our communities. We thank you, dear God, for bringing strong leaders into our lives. We thank you especially, today, for the call to this Church of Ashley Smith Ashley. Bless her as she prepares to preach for us, we pray. We pray, Lord, that as a congregation we would sense you are leading where we are going into the future. Gracious God, we pray for those whose needs are great today, for those who are sick, for those who care for the sick, for those who mourn the loss of loved ones. Lord, in our every need may we turn to you. And now, as we join our voices in prayer, praying the prayer first taught to us by your Son, who said, "Our father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

On the night that he was betrayed our Lord Jesus Christ took bread, and after he gave thanks to God his father, he broke it saying, "This is my body that has been broken for you. Do this in memory of me." In the same way after supper, Jesus took the cup saying, "This cup is the new covenant sealed by my blood. Whenever you drink from it, do so remembering me, for as often as you eat this bread and drink from this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes again." These are the gifts of God, given to the people of God. Let us share this meal together.

### **Rev. Emily Riley Campbell – Closing Prayer. Benediction and Blessing**

Would you please pray with me. Gracious and loving God, we thank you for the grace that we have received at this table today. We thank you, dear God, for your love expressed in this bread and cup. We thank you for your faithfulness. We thank you for your mercy and grace. Help us to lean into these gifts, we pray, not just today, but throughout the whole of our lives. We pray that our lives would reflect your heart in every way. Lord, please go with us as we go our separate ways. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Friends as we go from here today, let us go committed to do that which is right, committed to love mercy, committed to walk humbly with our God. And as we go, may the blessing of God almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit rest upon you and upon all those whom you love, this day and forever more. Amen.