

## Reflective Worship Oct 2024: Gentleness/humility

Love joy peace  
Patience, kindness, goodness  
Faithfulness, gentleness and self-control

Last 6 months – working through ‘lesser-known’ fruit of the Spirit listed in [Galatians 5:22-23](#)

Not in order – today ‘gentleness’ (NRSV and NIV)  
MSG – “not needing to force our way in life”  
GNB – “humility”

Humility – not a word we hear much of on TV and radio – or possibly at all on social media! Popular culture would have us believe that a fulfilled life is built on visible success – high earnings, power and control, celebrity.

Humility is associated with doormats and hypocrites  
If you’ve read or watched an adaptation of CD’s David Copperfield you will probably remember the odious Uriah Heep – he who claimed to be “so very ‘umble” whilst blackmailing and defrauding his employer.  
But that’s not humility. That’s manipulation and deception.

Or doormats. Those who feel unable to stand up for themselves, or for what is right. Those who end up ignored, trodden underfoot, and covered in someone else’s mess. Often it’s related to poor self-esteem – an ingrained sense of failure or shame which leads them to believe that they are not worth being treated with dignity and respect. Sometimes it’s for other reasons. It’s never good, and always needs to be addressed – but it is not humility.

I wonder what it is?

[Brief discussion. Examples of humility? How might you define/describe it?]

My ‘examples’

Porsche driving slowly along a long, straight residential road past a Primary School.

CS Lewis “Not thinking less of myself, but thinking of myself less.”

As in all things – Jesus is our example....

Bible readings:

**Ppns 2:3-8**

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

who, being in very nature God,

did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

rather, he made himself nothing

by taking the very nature of a servant,

being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man,

he humbled himself

by becoming obedient to death –

even death on a cross!

And what did this look like in practice?

**John 13: 2-5 & 12-15**

The evening meal was in progress... Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel round his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped round him.

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. 'Do you understand what I have done for you?' he asked them. 'You call me "Teacher" and "Lord", and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.'

Like the Porsche driver - (all the power – choosing not to use it for the good of others)

Jesus didn't relinquish his power – chose how and when to use it

Literally spoke truth to power (in the form of Pilate)

### **John 18:33-38**

Pilate.... summoned Jesus and asked him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' 'Is that your own idea,' Jesus asked, 'or did others talk to you about me?' 'Am I a Jew?' Pilate replied. 'Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?'

Jesus said, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.'

'You are a king, then!' said Pilate.

Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.'

'What is truth?' retorted Pilate.

Used his power to make a dramatic statement about the abuse of religious power

### **John 2:14-15**

In the temple courts Jesus found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables.

He showed it when speaking so, so movingly, to the criminal on the cross,

### **Luke 23:42-43**

Then the criminal said 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.'

Jesus answered him, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.'

And, of course the small matter of the resurrection  
Power demonstrated

Humility is not about us being worthless, but about us using who we are in the service of others

CS Lewis “Not thinking less of myself, but thinking of myself less.”

Jesus didn't relinquish his power – chose how and when to use it

How do we make these right choices?

When to do the foot washing, and when to take a lead?

When to challenge the status quo?

And when to quietly speak God's word's of love and forgiveness to someone who desperately needs to hear them?

How do we avoid our choices being driven, not by Jesus-shaped humility, but by the 'need to succeed'?

Paul and I have been joking this week about how this is going to be “the best sermon on humility ever!!”

### **Matt 18:1-3**

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?'

He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.'

(Except in terrible circumstances) Child knows they are loved by their parents. They don't have to do anything to be loved. They just are. They just have to 'be' themselves.

And that security in the love of the parent – that's exactly how Jesus was... Let's listen again to the first part of the foot-washing story...

### **John 13:2**

The evening meal was in progress... **Jesus knew** that the Father had put all things under his power, and **that he had come from God and was returning to God**; so he got up from the meal,

**Jesus knew .... that he had come from God and was returning to God**

He didn't need to 'prove' himself to God or to anyone else (including, importantly, himself). He knew who he was – God's beloved son.

And this set him free from all the stuff that nags at **us** about our self-image

Be that as 'someone with a successful home or work life'

Or as 'a kind and generous person'

A 'caring person'

A 'good preacher'

Or whatever we do that makes us feel 'worthwhile'

Not saying that these are not good things to aspire to

Am saying that these are not what we should build our sense of identity and self-worth upon.

When, like Jesus, we recognise that our identity is actually as a beloved child (infant? toddler? baby?) of God, then these things fall into their proper place.

The way we use our God-given self, with all our gifts and talents and

experience, flows out of that relationship of love and trust with the Father.

Picture of this in action – toddler – presence of parent/carer gives them confidence to explore and interact with their surroundings. To build their own towers and do their own scribbles – to the joy and delight of the parent.<sup>i</sup>

The choices about our *doing* flows from our *being*

Earlier in his letter to the Galatians, Paul speaks about seeking God's approval, rather than people's approval. We do what we do in response to God's love for us, not to make ourselves popular with others, or to make us feel good about ourselves.

For we are still called to "do".

Holding back on using the personality, the gifts and the attributes God has given us is not humility. Jesus shows us this.

So - here's the big challenge on our quest for Jesus-shaped humility.

Do you know/ I know that we are loved by God. That I am a child of God

"Nothing can make him love us less, and nothing can make him love us more"

And that this is enough?

Cos when we do it sets us free from all the striving and all the 'stuff'

And enables us to live lives of true humility.

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<sup>i</sup> Col 3:1-3

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, **for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.** (New life. Baptism as symbolic of passing through death)