

# Humility Jesus Style

---

*Lynne Baab*

*8 June 2014*

Sermon: Philippians 2:1-11

Other scripture: John 14:16-19, 25-26 and John 16:7-16

My husband Dave and I have two boys. When they were about 4 and 6, their favourite Bible character was Sampson. Maybe you'll remember some of Samson's story from the book of Judges. He did several feats of strength when the Holy Spirit came upon him. Our boys loved the story of Sampson tearing apart a lion with his bare hands.

"When Samson came to the vineyards of Timnah, suddenly a young lion roared at him. The spirit of the Lord rushed on him, and he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as one might tear apart a kid." Judges 14:5, 6.

The Spirit of the Lord helped Samson do this amazing feat of strength. For young boys, that was a kind of Holy Spirit they could get behind.

Today is Pentecost, and we're celebrating the coming of the Holy Spirit, giving us power from God and giving birth to the church. We're in the middle of a sermon series on Philippians, and our passage today talks about relationships and Jesus. I want to do two things in this sermon: describe the overlap between the Holy Spirit and our passage and then tell you my personal journey with this passage. Hopefully at the end I'll tie those two different things together!

The two topics in our passage are separate yet related. Let's look at the first four verses of Philippians 2:

"If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others."

I don't know about you, but I find it quite challenging to be of the same mind and in full accord with others. I need God's help to do that, and that's where the Holy Spirit comes into play. God's spirit helps me love. "In humility regard others as better than yourselves." I don't know

about you, but viewing others as better than myself is a big, big challenge. I can't do it without God's help, and the Holy Spirit is the One who helps me do it. "Look to the interests of others." Again, I can't do that without the Holy Spirit's help. That same spirit that gave Samson the power to do amazing feats of strength gives us the power to do amazing feats of strength as well. It takes enormous strength of character to love and care for others.

Then the transition verse in the middle of the passage, verse 5:

"Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus."

I'm quite fond of the WWJD bracelets. We can do a whole lot worse than trying to think about what Jesus would do in any situation. How do we figure out what Jesus might do? And where do we find the strength to do it ourselves? Both of those are the work of the Holy Spirit.

Then the rest of the passage (verses 6-11):

who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited,  
but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.  
And being found in human form,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him  
and gave him the name  
that is above every name,  
so that at the name of Jesus  
every knee should bend,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue should confess  
that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

When Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River, the Holy Spirit came down on him like a dove. That symbolized the fact that Jesus, the son of God on earth, was filled with the Holy Spirit himself. Jesus' ability to empty himself as a human came from all the power of God

in him. And then God exalted him. At the name of Jesus, every knee will bend. We bend the knee and confess that Jesus is Lord only by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is quite a remarkable statement for the first century Greece. Helen told us last week about the many gods people believed in. Yet ultimately only Jesus will receive worship. That comes from God's Holy Spirit at work.

Everything we do in obedience to God is led and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Every time we model ourselves after Jesus, it's the Holy Spirit prompting us to do that and empowering us to do that. But there's even more of a connection between the Holy Spirit and Jesus than that. My favourite seminary professor, Ray Anderson, liked to say that the Holy Spirit is stamped with the personality of Jesus. In John we read Jesus saying he's going away and then will come back. He'll come back to us through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is Jesus with us.

Jesus says to the disciples: "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me. . . . I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (John 14:18, 19).

"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me" (John 16:7).

Theologians throughout the centuries have discussed exactly what is the relationship between the Father, Son and Spirit, and I'm not going to be able to describe it in any fullness in one sermon. But I want to say this: The Father and Son send us the Spirit, and the Spirit brings us the presence of the Father and the Son. We sometimes think the Spirit is the wild man of the Trinity, doing the wild and dramatic things like the time Samson tore up a lion with his bare hands. Instead, I want to argue we are talking about one God. The Spirit speaks what he hears from the Father and the Son. The Spirit glorifies the Son. The Spirit reminds us what the Son said and teaches us the Father's priorities. One book on the Holy Spirit that I like is entitled "God's Empowering Presence." That's who the Holy Spirit is: God's empowering presence. Today we celebrate the fact that when Jesus ascended into heaven after his resurrection, he didn't go away in a permanent sense. He is present with us today, giving us power to do God's will.

Now, let me switch gears entirely and describe to you some of my personal journey with our passage today. The journey is in three stages: like, dislike, and then like again. In my early 20s when I discovered this passage, it seemed to make sense to me. The first half focuses on relationships, and yes, I could see pretty clearly we are called to love and care for others and not think of ourselves too highly. The second half of the passage focuses on Jesus. I learned that the words about Jesus might have been a hymn in Paul's time, and Paul uses those words effectively in Philippians. Jesus' humility and then exaltation seemed lovely and vivid and powerful to me as a young Christian.

In my 20s I had a job much like Ivan, our minister to students. In my 30s I was an elder in my congregation, and then in my 40s I was ordained as a Presbyterian minister. In those roles, I listened to a lot of people's stories. I heard people talk about their upbringing in the church, where this passage was used as a club. I heard a lot of these stories from women as well as men who told me about their voices in their church and family telling them to be more humble, to sacrifice their own desires for the needs of others. I heard a lot of what I would call "doormat" theology. This view asserts that Christians are called to be continually submissive to the all the people in their lives. If someone you love is an alcoholic, don't confront them. If someone in your life is abusive to you, don't leave or confront them. If someone in your life hits you, don't leave, don't address it, just be humble.

I began to think that the passage was written for its time. Last week Helen talked about the many gods the Greeks worshipped. So the idea that all knees would bow to Jesus would be pretty important for Christians in that time to understand. The Greek society was very hierarchical, with fixed social classes, so the idea of humility would be very important in that culture. But we, after 2000 years of hearing that we are supposed to be humble, may need to focus on other teaching than this passage. This passage, I found myself thinking, leads people into passivity, acceptance of abuse, and being a doormat.

My thinking about the passage began to change in recent years. I now believe that the doormat idea comes from a misreading of several things. It comes from a view of Jesus that I think is flawed. Do you believe Jesus always submitted to others? That he never fought back? That he was so humble he always did what other people wanted?

Well, no, that's simply not true of Jesus. We have vivid portrayals of Jesus using a whip on the money changers in the temple. Sorry, that's not "gentle Jesus meek and mild." That's great boldness and passion. Jesus confronted Peter. Remember that story? Jesus told Peter that the Messiah had to die, and Peter said, no, that's not necessary. Jesus replied, "Get behind me, Satan." Jesus called his own disciple "Satan" at the moment when Peter denied something

about Jesus' mission. In both of those stories Jesus was very clear on God's priorities. God wanted the temple to be a house of prayer for all nations, and the money changers were excluding people from worship based on some worshipper's inability to buy offerings. That so violated Jesus' sense of God's mission that he fought back. The same with the incident with Peter. Jesus had such a strong sense of God's mission on earth that he didn't let anyone get in the way of it.

The humility attributed to Jesus in this passage, and the kind of humility we are called to, must be different than the doormat view that's been promoted in the church. This kind of humility must involve assertiveness as well. It must involve strength of character to figure out the mission of God in our own lives and obey it. That's a kind of humility with strength.

Two weeks ago we heard a sermon by Kristin Jack. He mentioned some people who get up every morning and says, "Good morning, God. Show me where you're at work so I can join in." I think that's the kind of humility and submission attributed to Jesus. Remember Jesus went off alone to pray to get guidance from his Father? Remember Jesus who said that he does the will of the Father? That's the kind of submission the passage talks about.

In recent years as the true meaning of this passage has become clear to me, I see it very differently now. The submission of Jesus is all about doing the will of the Father, not giving in to the agenda of everyone around. Yes, we're called to love and care and humbly consider the needs of others, but we are not called to cave in when any of God's values or priorities are at stake.

What does this look like in practice? It looks like waking up in the morning and saying Kristin's words, "Good morning, God. Show me where you're at work so I can join in." Or maybe you'd prefer my version of that prayer: "God, I belong to you. Guide my life today, help me to obey you today."

It looks like a couple of girls in primary school who put together a bake sale to benefit people in Burkino Faso. Sophia Niblock and Freya Pettigrew boldly got up in front of the church and asked for your help. How many of you baked something for the sale? The kind of humility in this passage calls for us to enter into the wonderful plans of two girls holding a bake sale. I had a conversation with Sophia and she told me that the idea came from a moment when she was watching a TV show about how people could help those who are less fortunate. She felt God nudging her to do something, but she didn't know what. Helen then helped her get connected with the idea of helping people in Burkino Faso.

The kind of submission described in this passage looks like a bunch of people in this congregation who get up each morning and go to work and try to serve God in their workplace. Rachel Elder tries to find jobs for disabled people. Russel Elder cares for people in the hospital in the role of nurse. Rod Galloway, Richard Newton and Judith Forbes are principals of schools and in that role they try to serve their students, teachers, and parents with Christ's love, compassion and truth. Phil Hill as head of a center focused on disease prevention tries to figure out disease issues that affect people and compromise the life God wants for them. Our students study so they can become the people God wants them to be and enter into the careers God has for them. I could go on and on naming people in the congregation.

We can do none of this without the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. Yes, the Holy Spirit is all about power, many different kinds of power. Healing, miracles, and empowerment for amazing things like Samson tearing the lion up with his bare hands. This passage emphasizes the Spirit's guidance and empowerment to engage in God's priorities. What would Jesus do? Pray that his Father would guide him each day. Submit to the plan and priorities of his Father. Look to the power of the Spirit to do the things God wanted. And that's what we should do on Pentecost and every day.