

WGUMC February 4, 2018 Mark 9:33-37  
"Last of All and Servant of All"

Here's what I like about today's Gospel reading. It's refreshing to think that the disciples were embarrassed into silence when they got caught arguing about who was the greatest. I'm afraid boasting about how great you are doesn't cause much embarrassment these days. Here in Silicon Valley, it's almost a requirement.

Humility is one of those old-fashioned Christian virtues—like chastity—that we don't value very much because we don't understand it anymore. For one thing, we confuse humility with humiliation. Unlike humiliation, humility is never forced upon us. Being humble is a choice we make in how we relate to ourselves, to others, and to God.

It's also common to confuse humility with self-hatred. But it isn't that at all. As I see it, humility is what you have when you know God loves you and accepts you, and therefore you don't have to prove your worth to anyone. It doesn't matter if

you're a nothing to them because you are a something to God.

The Book of Numbers says, "Now the man Moses was very humble, more so than anyone else on the face of the earth."

[Numbers 12:3] Moses was a zero to Pharaoh, but he sure wasn't a nobody to God.

The Gospel of Matthew says, "All who exalt themselves will be humbled and all who humble themselves will be exalted."

[Matthew 23:12] What was true of Moses was also true of Jesus. Jesus was great because he was willing to make himself small. He was first because he was willing to be last. He was Lord of all only because he came to be servant of all.

Given the culture we live in today, it's very, very difficult to follow this servant Jesus. We really have no clue how to be humble. We need someone to teach us. Let me tell you a story about a man who had to go half-way around the world and learn that lesson the hard way.

In September, 2016, one hundred thousand people gathered in Saint Peter's Square for the celebration of Mother Teresa's canonization. In the front row was Gary Morsch, founder and chairman of Heart to Heart International, a medical relief agency. Here is Morsch's story about how he met Mother Teresa as told by Dean Nelson:

"Morsch remembers the first time he visited her in Kolkata. He was a new doctor and had come to the Sisters of Charity site from Kansas City in order to do good. He chatted briefly with Mother Teresa and asked where he could best be put to use. She wrote something on a piece of paper, folded it in half, and handed it to him. 'Take this to Sister Priscilla,' she told him in her raspy voice.

"Morsch took the note to the nearby House for the Dying Destitute and thought to himself that it was just the kind of place a doctor should be. He thought, 'Soon, I will change the

sign on this building, and it will be called the House of Hope for the Living.' He was going to make a difference.

"He handed the note to Sister Priscilla, who glanced at the contents and smiled slightly. 'Follow me,' she said. They walked through the men's ward, a large, open room with rows of cots cradling what Morsch said were people who were skeletons with skin. Some were tossing in pain, too weak to fight their afflictions or even to eat. 'This is where I should work,' Morsch thought. 'I can relieve some of this suffering.'

"But Sister Priscilla continued walking, and they entered a women's ward, a room filled with emaciated women who stared at them. 'OK—this is where I can be useful,' Morsch thought. Then they walked into the kitchen, where a modest lunch of rice was being prepared over an open fire. 'Now I get it,' Morsch thought. 'They want to give me lunch first!'

"They walked out of the building and into the back alley. Sister Priscilla pointed at a large pile of garbage that was so

revolting Morsch gagged. 'We need you to take this garbage down the street to the dump.' she said, handing him two buckets and a shovel. 'The dump is several blocks down on the right. You can't miss it.' Then she was gone.

"Morsch was stunned. Didn't they realize he was a doctor? He dug into the pile and carried the buckets of refuse to the dump. There he was amazed by the number of people who were swarming the area looking for something to eat or something of value. He also wondered how signals had gotten crossed such that he had ended up on garbage duty. By the end of the day the garbage pile was gone, and Morsch was drenched in sweat and stench. He walked back through the kitchen, the women's ward, and the men's ward to tell Sister Priscilla good-bye. That's when he saw the sign over the doorway, in Mother Teresa's handwriting: 'You can do no great things—only small things with great love.'

"My heart melted,' Morsch said. 'It dawned on me that serving others is not about how much I know. It's about attitude and availability to do whatever is needed—with love. I learned that shoveling garbage with love is different from just shoveling garbage.'" [*The Christian Century*, Nov. 23, 2016, p. 10]

I thought of that story yesterday morning as I watched everyone getting Woodhaven and the Wesley Room and kitchen ready for our Village House guests to come this week. I smiled as I watched all the workers with their college degrees and skills and life experiences moving furniture, washing windows, scrubbing counters, sweeping out the garage, and cleaning out the gutters. The work may have been well below their pay grade but they were doing it with love.

I consider that the Village House coming here is a gift. It gives us a chance to come together, serve together and learn an important truth about humility. As Rick Warren puts it,

"Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less." I want to be someone who thinks of herself less.

And that made me think about Don Buell the other day. For those of you who don't know, Don was a long-time member of this church. He and his wife, Kay, were instrumental in starting and supporting the preschool. He also set up the sound system in the sanctuary and with Kay did a hundred other things around the church. The other day someone was sharing details about his life that I didn't know, and I found myself feeling sorry that I didn't get to do a funeral for the family when he died late last year. Nevertheless, I understand why the family decided not to have a service for him. If you knew Don, you know that he never ever talked about himself or wanted anyone else to. Though a lot of us would have liked to hear about all of his adventures and accomplishments, I can't think of anything that would have pained him more than to be

looking down from heaven, having to listen to us praise him. He would have had to die all over again.

I can hear Jesus saying to Don, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your soul." [Matthew 11:29] I am certain that Don found rest for his soul and we can, too. We just need someone like Don to teach us how to follow Jesus. By learning how to be last of all and servant of all, we can be the happiest of all. Then we will praise God who is above all and through all and in all! Amen!