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July 12, 2026

Scripture: John 3: 22-36

Sermon Title: The Path of Humility

John 3:22-36

22 After this Jesus and his disciples went into the region of Judea, and he spent some time there with them and baptized. 23 John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim because water was abundant there, and people kept coming and were being baptized. 24 (John, of course, had not yet been thrown into prison.)

25 Now a discussion about purification arose between John's disciples and a Jew.[a] 26 They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing, and all are going to him." 27 John answered, "No one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven. 28 You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Messiah,[b] but I have been sent ahead of him.' 29 He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom who

stands and hears him rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled. 30 He must increase, but I must decrease.”[c]

31 The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is above all. 32 He testifies to what he has seen and heard, yet no one accepts his testimony. 33 Whoever has accepted his testimony has certified[d] this, that God is true. 34 He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. 35 The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands. 36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life but must endure God's wrath. (This is the Word of the Lord)

Prayer...

Introduction:

This morning we come to a passage where we listen to the thoughts of John the Baptist. As a reminder, John the Baptist is a relative of Jesus who has his own following of disciples. The context is that John's followers appear to be a little jealous of Jesus and his disciples. A lot of baptizing of people is happening and there seems to be a comparison of John's ministry with his disciples and Jesus' ministry.

John is asked about Jesus and what he and his disciples are doing and John the Baptist in this story humbles himself. John the Baptist refers to himself as the friend of the bridegroom. Jesus is the groom in this metaphor. John explains that like a good friend of the bridegroom, he is happy for Jesus to increase and John the Baptist understands that he must decrease.

Have you ever been part of a wedding party? I have been a best man in two weddings and the key to being a good, best man is to say affirming things at the reception that affirm groom and the bride.

You want to say positive things, maybe be a bit funny, and then you want to get out of the way so that the newly married couple get all the attention.

I had a good best man when I got married to Karen. My best man was a guy named Chris Koch. We were buddies for years both in college at Whitworth and during my time at Fuller Seminary. Chris was so supportive of me getting married that he actually teared up a little bit. I remember him saying during the reception that he had never seen me more happy than at my wedding. He was right and by the way Karen and I will be celebrating 25 years of marriage on Sept. 8th.

I like that John the Baptist in our story is happy for Jesus, just like a best man is happy to support the groom and bride. John the Baptist also does not fall for his disciples plea to compare himself to Jesus.

John knows that he is not the Messiah. He knows that he must decrease and that Jesus must increase.

In Dale Bruner's commentary on John's Gospel, we see that John the Baptist models what all ministers of the Gospel should do. Good preachers, good pastor, good ministers of any kind are encouraged in this story to follow the example of John by lifting up the name of Jesus.

I think about this a lot as a pastor. My job is really to get out of the way, so that you and I can cultivate a deep relationship with Jesus. Our job in the world is to point people to a relationship with Jesus and to share his love and compassion with others. Jesus is to be the center of the Church and our mission.

What is counter-cultural about that calling is that our society often encourages us to make ourselves and our own lives the center rather than Christ. John the Baptist's mini sermon is an invitation for us to be humble and to lift up Christ above ourselves.

I want to reflect on humility with you in depth today. Is our goal to be more humble people? I think we want to say yes, but this topic may be a bit sensitive to us. I want to talk with us first about what humility is not.

Humility is not low self esteem and it is not taking up little space.

God desires us to love ourselves. The reality is the more we really love ourselves the more humble we can become. If you wonder about that, let me ask us this question? Did Jesus love himself?

Philippians teaches us that Jesus did not count equality with God as something to be grasped, but he did love himself. He was confident in his calling and sought to live into his full potential as God's Son. In a similar way, God wants us to know we are beloved and that we can be confident to fulfill our callings in this world. Whether that calling relates to the roles we play in our families, our friendships, this church, or other work.

Many of us are invited to actually deepen our self-esteem, by affirming ourselves more and being open to the love and encouragement of others. One of my spiritual practices is to listen daily to spiritual meditations that encourage me to love myself and practice the art of gratitude and positive visioning in my life. I almost always feel more peaceful and hopeful after my spiritual meditations. If you are a person that struggles with self-esteem, you are not alone, my hope is that our Christian Wellness center church here at Newberg First Presbyterian will help you feel more loved and more positive about yourself and God' purpose and plan for your life. So, humility is not low self- esteem. Humility is not thinking poorly of ourselves. We are created in the image of God. We are beautiful, gifted people, anointed by God. We want to have positive feelings about ourselves, while avoiding arrogance or unhealthy pride. To me humility is the invitation to rest so much in God's love that I do not cling to achievement or praise from others as the place where I

find my purpose. Humility is the gift of being so secure in who you are that you can allow others to get the praise and affirmation. When you are at peace with who you are, you can be truly humble. When you need success and achievement to find your self-worth or when you find your worth primarily in what you do rather than who you are, it is harder to receive the gift of humility.

I want to add here that there are different seasons when we need more support to achieve our successes in life. Children, Teenagers, and young adults do need a lot of encouragement to pursue dreams. As we are developing our identities we need to prioritize personal goals, education, and work opportunities. The hope though is that even as we go through different seasons we can put Jesus first and stay humble in our love and service of others.

In my middle aged existence, I am realizing how grateful I am for all the people who have encouraged me on the journey, whether it was related to the journey I went on to pursue education, relationships,

or vocational opportunities. I needed a lot of support to become a pastor and to pursue my dreams. Now that I am here, I realize I want the last half of my life to be less about me. I genuinely do wish to become a more humble person. I want my life to become about worldly success and more about growing in love of others. I want to become a person that finds more joy in other people doing well than me alone.

Too be honest, I feel at this stage of life, that I have been very fortunate. Anything life brings me that is positive at this point feels like icing on top of a really good life. My hope is that the future will remain positive for me and my family, but I want to be a person who again finds more joy in the success of others.

John the Baptist knew that Jesus was going to increase and that he would decrease. John did not become jealous of Jesus. He rejoiced in the growth of Christ's ministry. What if part of our journey as Christians is to find even more joy in the Gospel going forth in the

world than in solely are pursuit of the American dream. Yes, our dreams are important, but wouldn't it be nice if we could find joy in helping others fulfill their dreams.

I think of the example of coaches who support athletes with Special Olympics. I think of teachers who watch their students develop skills and go off to attend college. I think of supervisors who equip their staff members and then stand back as their colleagues accomplish wonderful things.

The path of humility is really the path ultimately of greater freedom and wholeness, when life becomes more about growing in love and putting our trust and worth in our God of love.

In the Gospel story, Jesus increases while John the Baptist decreases, but Jesus ultimately humbles himself by facing the cross. Suffering has a way of keeping us humble on the path of life as well. Jesus and John model for us true humility.

Our invitation is to put the values of the kingdom of God before our own achievement. We are to partner together in empowering the poor and oppressed. We are to show grace to the vulnerable. As we rest in God's love, we can spread peace and hope to our world.

One example of humility from our church happened last Wednesday. I was so pleased on Wednesday night to gather with the members of our new Peace Garden Committee. Those members include Nancy Thurston, Nancy Backes, Kim Godshalk, Lory Albright, Cynthia Burden, Jennifer Searls, Misa Anderson, James Wen, and Ciaran Hynes. What was so wonderful about our time together was witnessing the humble spirit of service that everyone displayed during our conversation. Folks offered to weed, plant, and harvest. Lory Albright offered to help us harvest the vegetable garden and I just learned during this Spring alone we have already given out 150 pounds of produce to the Newberg Fish Food Bank. Other members of the Peace Garden Committee are interested in

putting on events, arranging volunteers, creating a fruit forest, and helping with communications. By the way, if you hear all this and would like to help provide support for the Peace Garden, please let any of us on the committee know or you can contact our office.

It is amazing what God can do when we humble ourselves and make Christ the center of our lives. I wonder how God is working in your life right now. Are you being drawn into the path of humility where Christ increases and your identity becomes more shaped by the values of Christ than simply the worldly success of money and fame. What if Jesus is actually right that we find our lives in losing our lives. We find our purpose when we get out of the way and let Jesus take center stage in our lives.

How is Jesus calling us as individuals, but also us as a church on the path of humility where the mission of Jesus the peacemaker and bridgebuilder guides us in being a Christian Spirituality Center for the community of Newberg. As we humble ourselves and listen to

the Holy Spirit, we will hear more nudges on how we might faithfully live out our mission together. Let us pray...