

Sermon for Sunday, June 29, 2025 Humility in Kindness

Ruth 2: 8-13
Philippians 2:1-15
Luke 22:47-51

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Today we resume the worship series that we began on June 15: the Campaign for Kindness. This series will continue through the end of July. Today's theme: Humility in Kindness. *(Pause)*

Earlier this week I received word that my godmother Ardell Erstad died at age 94. Our families were very close and growing up we spent lots of time together; all in the safety of the small town of Ada. In our reminiscing about Ardell's life one of her daughters told me the following story: One day Ardell was looking out her kitchen window and saw a woman walking east toward the local hospital. I'm not sure how it came about that Ardell engaged this stranger in conversation. But the sight of a stranger walking past her home several days in a row likely piqued her curiosity. What Ardell learned was that the woman and her husband had been in a car accident and he was recuperating in the local hospital. She was staying at the only motel on the west side of town and (not having a car) would walk across town to see her husband—a distance of probably about 15 blocks. Ardell's home was just four blocks from the hospital and she had an empty bedroom. So she invited the woman to stay in her home until her husband was released from the hospital. In that moment Ardell acted with kindness, compassion, and humility. I doubt that Ardell ever saw the couple ever again or had any contact with them. But when she saw a need, she took action. I share this story in part out of respect for my godmother but also because it is a story of compassion, kindness, and humility.

Humility in Kindness that's our theme for today. Ardell's story isn't going to make it into the bible but there is another story of compassion, kindness, and humility that did: this is the story of Ruth. Ruth, out of her deep compassion for her mother-in-law Naomi, accompanies her back to Bethlehem. It was almost certainly a dangerous journey: whether Naomi went alone or Ruth and Naomi together; two women with no adult male to escort and protect them placed them in a deeply vulnerable position. The good news is that they made it safely back to Bethlehem—Naomi's home

town. But this village is not Ruth's home. She was a foreigner and had no blood relatives in this village. Considering the cultural practices of the day Ruth would have been much better off staying in Moab as her sister-in-law did. To be sure, as a widow, Ruth's prospects weren't good in Moab either but presumably she would have been cared for by family. It is really rather surprising that Ruth cast aside all concern for her own well-being and instead accompanied Naomi to her home in Bethlehem.

When the women arrive it is harvest time and the grain is being bundled into sheaves and carried to a threshing floor. Gleaning was the practice of allowing people to walk the harvested field and pick up stray stalks of grain. Time consuming and labor-intensive, gleaning was a means for the very poor to gather food to sustain themselves. It was common practice in Israel and the equivalent of a modern day food shelf. But it was also humble and occasionally dangerous work as the poor worked their way across the field gathering. Ruffians might set upon the gleaners and steal what they have so painstakingly gathered. Yet Ruth was willing to go out to the fields and glean because it was the most practical way to support herself and take care of Naomi. Ruth's kindness and humility were rewarded when Boaz heard of her situation and granted her protection as she gleaned in the fields. *(Pause)*

We turn now to the reading from Philippians that Paul wrote as encouragement to that early church. The early Christian church needed to figure out how to live in a Christ-like manner. Their call to follow Jesus was counter-cultural and it was tempting to fall back into the dominant Roman way of living. Paul put it this way, "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." Look to the interests of others. That's what Ruth did. She thought first about Naomi and not about her own personal needs.

The reading from Philippians includes a famous passage that Bible scholars think may have been a very early hymn of praise written about Jesus. These words in particular, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, 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." That's the ultimate in humility. For God's only son Jesus gave up his "life at God's right hand" and became one of

us—a human living in the midst of all the messiness of life. We suppose that he spent many years working as a laborer between the ages of 12 and age 30 when he began his ministry. If this is true then he lived among the people, and saw the struggles of their lives. He saw the sickness and injuries and death that afflict all humans. *(Pause)*

Humility in Kindness along with setting ourselves apart: The apostle Paul wrote as he did because he recognized that it was important for those early followers of Jesus to set themselves apart from the Roman culture in which they were living. We must also consider the same.

We live in a world where we are generally taught to be tough. It's the tough guys who win. It's the tough guys who claw their way to the top of the corporate ladder and come out on top. Supposedly that's how you succeed in this world. But believing that we need to be tough so as to succeed is not the way that Jesus taught nor is it the way that he lived.

That's why I had B-J read the passage from Luke 22. This is the opening scene from Jesus' arrest. "When those who were around [Jesus] saw what was coming, they asked, 'Lord, should we strike with the sword?' Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, 'No more of this!' And he touched his ear and healed him."

At the very moment when his disciples drew a sword to act tough and defend him; what did Jesus do? He ordered that the sword be put away. He healed the injured man. He allowed his arrest to occur knowing full well that he would be treated shamefully by the powerful people of the day: both the religious elite and the politicians. We think Jesus was about 33 years old at this time and he most certainly had seen people being crucified. Crucifixions were very public—on purpose—to scare the population into obedience and submission. Not only was crucifixion cruel, but intended to be deeply shaming and Jesus humbly stumbled all the way to the cross. For Jesus this was not a moment of toughness, nor a moment of false bravado, nor a moment of superiority. This was a moment of humility. This was a moment of self-sacrifice. Jesus knew the risks involved; knew that he would eventually end up on a cross and he humbly stepped forward anyway.

If our goal is to emulate Jesus, then the words from Paul's letter to the Philippians bring guidance: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who...humbled himself."

In conclusion: here is what I know about you as followers of Jesus: I know you as compassionate and kind and humble people, like Ruth, like Ardell. Keep on. Act out of the kindness that the Holy Spirit nurtures in your hearts. Act with humility. As Jesus taught in Luke 6:35 "Love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High;" Yes my friends, your reward will be very great, but not with silver and gold, the way the culture of our world measures success—rather you will be known as "children of the Most High." That's the hope we cling to, and it is what we need to know and hold in our hearts for today. Amen.