

November 22-26, 2021 Edition

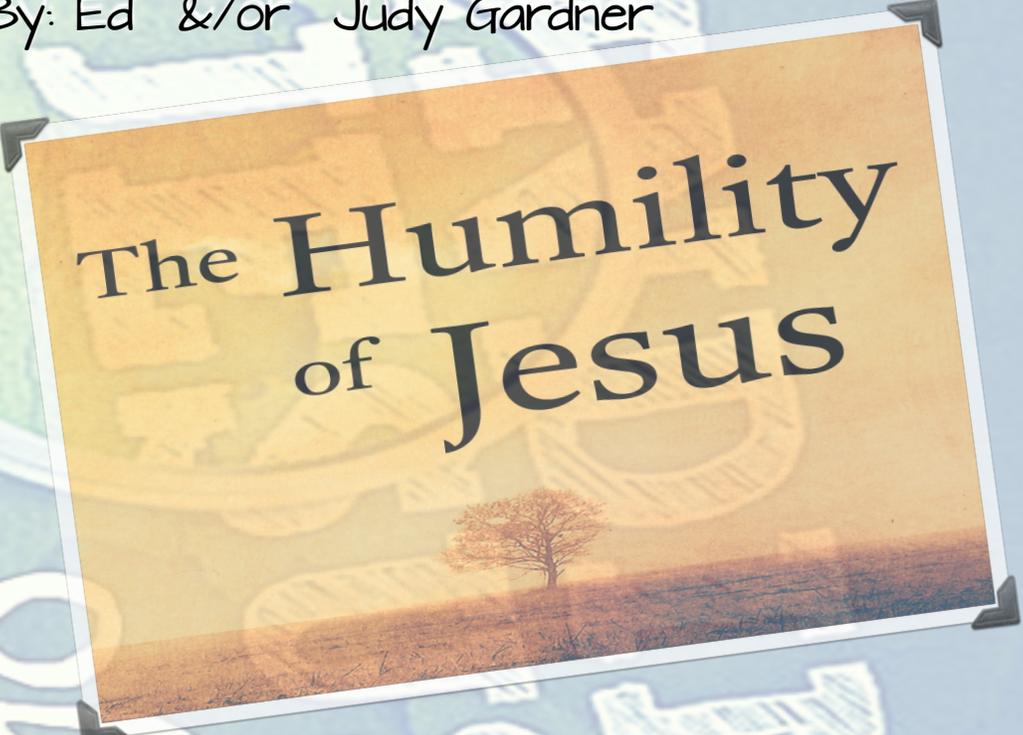
The "BIG Story" Of The Bible #79

The Gospel According To Moses #10

Lessons From Jesus On Humility

By: Ed &/or Judy Gardner

November 20/21, 2021



The Humility of Jesus

When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest :D) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday Reflection: This week we're going to finish up our detour (I hope) by looking at the virtue of humility as taught by Jesus to His disciples. This is the lesson Jesus kept coming back to over and over again with His disciples. Why? Because He had to. They just weren't getting it. They kept arguing over things that proved they hadn't learned the lesson of humility yet.

Now some of you reading this might be wondering why I've spent so much time on humility during this (not so) little detour we've taken during our series on Exodus and if you stop and think about you'll probably realize the answer to that question is the same answer as why Jesus kept teaching His disciples about humility- we just miss it so often. So one more week looking at this elusive virtue.

In the first century the people of Israel were worn out. They had been a conquered people for around 800 years. First the Assyrians, then the Babylonians, then the Persians, then the Greeks and finally the Romans. Add to that the evolution of the Jewish religious system and you've got a people who are at their wits end. The religious leaders of the first century had taken the Law that God gave to Israel and turned it into one of the most oppressive religious systems the world has ever seen. Trying to navigate daily life for the Jews was like trying to navigate the IRS tax system in 21st century America- it was next to impossible. A typical Jewish family was constantly worried they might accidentally do something that was against the Law of God and be condemned because of it.

Not because that was God's intent. God gave Israel His Law and intended it to be a blessing. He intended that the Law would be something beautiful and draw the Nations to Him because of how blessed Israel would be if (and that as it turned out was might big "if") they followed it the best they could. But the religious leaders of the first century had taken this blessing given by God and created a legal code that was impossible to interpret without a lawyer (pronounced "Pharisee"). It was defeating. It was terrifying and it was exhausting. So it's no wonder that the people sat up and listened when Jesus said this:

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. Matthew 11:28-30 (NRSV)

Sounds pretty good, doesn't it? Rest? Did He say rest? I'm in! But what brings that rest according to Jesus? It must be a hammock swaying in the breezy shade where I can sip lemonade and nap the afternoon away. Or maybe it's a Lazyboy recliner that I can put lay back in and snooze while the game's on. Or maybe it's one of those fancy mattresses made out of memory foam so I can finally get a good night's rest. That's got to be it, right? Nope. Jesus says in order to find this "rest" we need to do what? Take up His yoke.

Huh? His yoke? Here I was thinking Jesus was offering me more rest and instead it sounds like He's demanding more work. I guess the "yoke's" on us? Go ahead and finish laughing. I'll wait. But seriously- what's the deal with the yoke? It does sound like work right? Well, yeah but that's because we misunderstand the yoke. I always thought a yoke was a harness like they put on a horse or ox to plow or pull a wagon. I pictured Jesus throwing this harness over my head and cracking the whip and driving me to work harder and longer. How does that equate to rest? It doesn't.

A yoke is different from your traditional harnesses. A yoke does harness an animal but instead of harnessing just one animal it binds two animals together in perfect harmony so that they have to work together. In fact when a young ox was being trained by a farmer they would yoke the younger animal with a mature older animal so the younger animal could learn what was expected of it. Worked like a charm. Still wondering how this equates to rest?

Look at Whose "yoke" we are being invited to "take upon us". It's not the yoke of some older, more mature Christian. It's Jesus' yoke. What does that mean? It means He's in the other side of the yoke. When we take His yoke upon us we find Him on the other side of us leading us, guiding us and doing the Lion's share of the work (see what I did there? Lion's share? Jesus is the Lion of Judah. Oh man sometimes I slay myself but I am digressing here...). All that is required of us is to get into the yoke, buckle up and hold on. This is how Jesus' guidance works.

While we are in the yoke of Jesus He will also teach us how to live the lives He created us to live and all of that will revolve around humility. All of it. Jesus' rest isn't so much about physical rest. He expects us to take care of that ourselves (in fact it's one of the 10 commandments). What Jesus' yoke offers us is "soul rest" which I have a feeling all of us could use some of at this point in what has turned out to be the worst 2 years of most of our lives. So pray that Jesus will show you how to yoke up and we'll spend the next 4 days looking at lessons on humility He taught His disciples over and over and over and over again.

Tuesday Reflection: So one day Jesus has a visitor with a request. I could tell you about it but it would make more sense to just read what Matthew wrote about that day:

Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. "What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom." "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" "We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father." Matthew 20:20-23 (NIV)

What was John & James' mom (who was probably Jesus' aunt by the way) asking Him for? Basically she was inquiring about where her sons (Jesus' cousins) would be placed in the pecking order in Jesus' Kingdom. That's an interesting phrase, isn't it? Pecking order. What's a pecking order. Well, if you keep chickens you know what I'm talking about. Every chicken kingdom has a pecking order with one chicken at the very top and every other chicken in the kingdom/coop falling somewhere in order beneath that top chicken. Every chicken above you in the pecking order is allowed to "peck" you at will. The more chickens above you in the pecking order the more you're getting pecked. Therefore it is best to be as high in the pecking order as is chickenly possible and whoa to the chickens at the bottom.

This is also the way many human organizations work. If you're in the military or the corporate world or if you've ever stood in a group while two team captains picked dodgeball teams then you are VERY familiar with pecking orders. Everyone assumed Jesus' Kingdom would have a pecking order.

They were wrong.

When the ten other disciples heard what James and John had asked, they were indignant. But Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. Matthew 20:24-25 (NLT)

Why were the other ten disciples mad at James & John? Because they thought of this first. Like I said this is the number one most often argued about subject among the 12 apostles. Every time Jesus notices them arguing over the pecking order He stops and considers it a "teachable moment". He starts out pointing out how the kingdoms of this world universally work- with someone at the very top and then everyone else fitting into a pecking order where a person is pecked by whoever is above them but is allowed to mercilessly peck anyone under them. Then Jesus tells them what His Kingdom would look like:

But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many. Matthew 20:26-28 (NLT)

What's He saying? He's saying that in His Kingdom there will be no pecking order. In Jesus' Kingdom leaders are the servants and the first will be a slave. It seems impossible, doesn't it? How can the greatest be a servant and how can the first be last? It doesn't make much sense, does it? In fact it seems impossible. But Jesus deals in the realm of impossibilities. I remember when we were just starting out at Riverside and we were trying to figure out how to structure our little church. The Bible has several models for church leadership but all of them have one denominator- no pecking order. The leaders in Jesus' Kingdom will always be servants first and foremost. The first will be last and the last will be first. It's an upside down kingdom. The way up in Jesus' Kingdom is down. The way to greatness is to serve. I heard one preacher refer to it as a "downward rising" and I really like that imagery. Just thinking about what downward rising looks like will keep you busy all day if you really try to wrap your brain around it.

So we decided Riverside's leadership would be known as the SALT team (SALT standing for Servant And Leadership Team). You can't be a leader at Riverside without serving at Riverside. There are no positions of "power". Every once in a while somebody will show up at Riverside and like what they see (at first). They'll start asking questions that make it obvious they're looking for how to get into a position of leadership/power. Generally when they realize there aren't any of those positions here they move on to greener pastures where they can find some semblance of a pecking order.

I remember once when I was explaining how Riverside is structured one person told me, "that's impossible. No organization that is structured like that can survive." In the first few years of Riverside's existence I sometimes wondered if that were true. We believed that God was asking us to structure Riverside in this way but the outcome was far from certain. But in faith when someone would tell us Riverside was impossibly structured we'd remember Jesus's words:

Jesus looked at them intently and said, "Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But with God everything is possible. Matthew 19:26 (NLT)

And now here we are almost 22 years later and somehow God has made the impossible, possible. I still have no idea how He did/does it but now rather than just faith we see the

results of God's upside down Kingdom working itself out in this strange experiment we call Riverside Community Church. It's not always pretty. Sometimes it's downright terrifying. It's one of the reasons we like to say that at Riverside we do church different. It's not that we think this is the only way to do church. It's not even that we think this is the best way to do church. It's just that we believe with all of our hearts that this how God is asking us to "do church" at Riverside. And the result is a beautiful, impossible, messy, miraculous and chaotically exhilarating roller coaster ride.

And that's exactly what your life will be if you choose to enter into Jesus' upside down Kingdom with your own individual life. It's the only kind of life Jesus offers. So what do you say? Ready to use your "E" ticket to get on Jesus' wild ride (those of you who are old and went to Disneyland in the old days know what I mean ;o) All it takes is a willingness to live your life in Jesus' yoke learning what humility is (and what it isn't). In this case humility is serving when traditional leaders would sneer at the idea and putting yourself last when the world shouts for you to pull others down to put yourself first.

Wednesday Reflection: So yesterday we talked about how for Jesus Humility is the path to greatness in a downward rising sort of way. Today we're going to look at another lesson Jesus taught His disciples about humility when He caught them arguing (again) about which one of them would be the "greatest" in His Kingdom:

About that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?" Jesus called a little child to him and put the child among them. Then he said, "I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. So anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. Matthew 18:1-4 (NLT)

Ok- so maybe Matthew doesn't tell us directly that the apostles were once again arguing over the pecking order among them but this question is a direct result of all those "meaningful conversations" they had been having on the subject. So they ask Him straight out. Why? Maybe they were tired of getting caught trying to sneak these conversations where Jesus (hopefully) couldn't hear them. Maybe whoever it was that asked was expecting Jesus to say, "why, you're the greatest oh favorite apostle of mine!" We'll never know for sure. But we do know how Jesus responded- the greatest in the Kingdom is the one who is as humble as a little child. What does that mean?

Jesus has a high opinion of children. He loves them. All the children of the world (now those of you who grew up in Sunday school have the Jesus Loves The Little Children song stuck in your head for the rest of the day- you're welcome). But Jesus was about the only one who had a high opinion of children in the ancient world. In the ancient world children were unimportant until they had survived childhood which was in no way a sure thing. Between sickness, hunger and violence only 25% of all humans born in the ancient world actually grew up to become adults. Because of that in most of the world children were not valued much. I mean, there was a 75% chance these little humans that sucked up so many resources and added very little back into the family in terms of survival wouldn't be around for very long so why treat them well? There is a book written by a man named Bakke that has a really sad name: When Children Became People.

What prompted the change in how the world viewed children? Jesus did. His followers remembered how much He valued and honored children and so orphanages and other institutions that help the most vulnerable in any society were created by followers of this man named Jesus. But what we're here to talk about today is what Jesus says about Children, humility and greatness- "anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven."

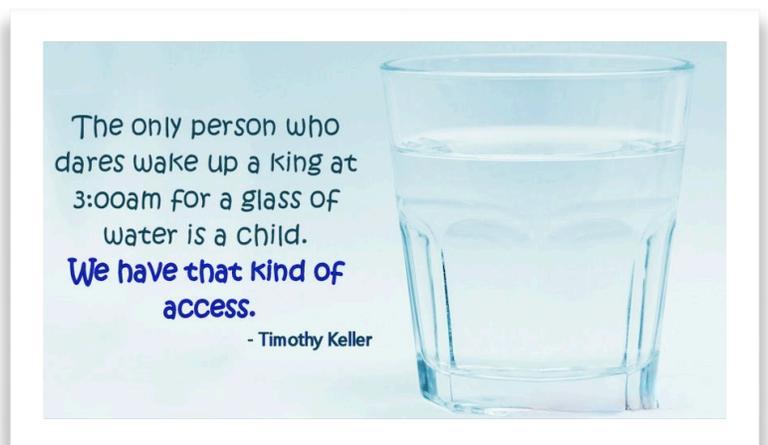
What does that mean? How does one "become" as humble as a child. What are we shooting for here? There are so many answers out there in the world that it's tough to pick one but if I was going to pick one it would be trust. Children are born trusting the adults in their lives. Some adults prove themselves unworthy of that trust but for the most part even untrustworthy adults are trusted by their children (which causes an awful lot of the pain in this world and fills the couches of therapists with grown ups whose trust was violated as a child). It's heart breaking. But this reflection is about what it means for us to "become as humble as a child".

Have you ever heard a child ask how much something costs? Have you ever seen a child who believed it was up to them to figure out how to survive. Sure, some kids are forced into survival mode from an early age but most kids just assume that the adults in their lives are competent and will handle whatever comes along. I remember thinking the adults around me when I was growing up had all the answers and always made the right decisions. I couldn't wait until I was "grown up" and would know what the right thing to do in any situation and then always did that right thing no matter what. Boy was I disappointed when I got to the age where I realized that just wasn't true.

So what's the answer then? I think what Jesus is getting at here is that the greatest in the Kingdom will be those who learn to trust and rely on His Father the way children do their Father. But followers of Jesus can (and often do) become disillusioned when God doesn't shield us from all the pain in our own lives. It's inevitable if you live long enough. Why God doesn't step in and fix the truly painful stuff in our lives leaves most of us wondering what went wrong. We could turn this reflection into a real marathon talking about why God allows bad things to happen to good people and why He allows good things to happen to bad people but that's another lesson for another day. Trust is hard for us especially when things are going wrong all around us. I think what Jesus is saying is that to the extent that you and I are able to trust God the way a child trusts their parents, to that extent our lives would shine in such a way that it would illuminate our pathway to greatness. Not greatness as the world defines it but greatness the way Jesus defines it.

How do we develop that kind of trust?

Only through trial and error. In other words as the trials of our lives come and we attempt to



trust God through it all we keep trying even after a failure on our part- and even after a success on our part. It's truly not an easy thing to "develop" but the benefits of making it a goal for our lives are nothing short of eternal. So for today maybe spend some time thinking about what trusting God the way a child trusts their parents might look like in your own life and I'll leave you with this quote from Tim Keller: The only person who dares wake up a King at 3 AM for a glass of water is a child. We have that kind of access.

Thursday Reflection: Today we're going to carry on with the same thread that we finished yesterday with- the trust of a child. Jesus said that the greatest in His Kingdom would become as humble as a little child. We talked about how that might mean we learn to trust God the way a child implicitly trusts the adults in their lives (unit they're taught that trust is unwarranted). Today I want to jump off from the picture I shared above and think about this from another perspective- access.

Kids think they belong everywhere. If someone is trying to keep them out of a place what does a kid do? They do their best to go into that forbidden place. Whether it's a parent trying to find a couple of minutes of peace for a bathroom break or someone foolishly trying to close the sanctuary doors during the sermon- if a kid wants access they demand access. Sure they are often thwarted but you get the gist.

Jesus portrays our access to our Heavenly Father like this. The more childlike we become the more confidence we'll have in approaching our Father- even if some other adults have told us that we've gone too far to ever have that kind of access again. In the first century those killjoys were called Pharisees. There was a huge percentage of people in Israel that believed the Pharisees when they were told that God would never allow them access again. So Jesus told this story:

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people-robbers, evildoers, adulterers-or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' Luke 18:9-13 (NIV)

What's Jesus getting at here? Well we'll see that more clearly when we get to his surprise twist of an ending (M Night Shyamalan's got nothing on Jesus when it comes to twists nobody saw coming) but let's start with the setup. We tend to see the Pharisees as bad guys but that's not how the Jews in Israel saw them. The common people thought the Pharisees were God's favorites and for the most part they believed the Pharisees knew what they were talking about. Jesus presents this Pharisee as a stuck up know it all which would have been right in line with how the people saw them. They would have gasped when they learned that a tax collector had the unmitigated temerity (I love that phrase and I believe it's the first time I've ever used it in a reflection) to go to the Temple to pray. They would have been on pins and needles wondering what was going to happen. Everything would have made sense to them until Jesus dropped the surprise ending:

I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.
Luke 18:14 (NIV)

Now let me tell you, if there were gasps when Jesus said a tax collector had the gall to go to the Temple to pray there would have been shouts and probably a few "NO WAY"s when He said it was the tax collector who went home justified before God. I love this story and we could spend all day talking about it but for today's purposes let's stick with the whole childlike trust/access that comes from humility. What is Jesus saying about that in particular with this parable?

That it's never too late to come home. That just like the Father welcomed home the Prodigal Son, if you or I are ever in a situation where we need to seek forgiveness (a daily occurrence for me and maybe for you too?) we have the kind of access to our Father in Heaven that a child has with his/her parents. So go ahead- wake God up at the most inopportune of times (not that God really sleeps but you know what I mean) and like a child trust that your Father will always be happy to hear from you- because He is. The more you and I can remember that and incorporate it into our lives the more we'll grow in humility and Jesus says that translates into at least one thing- Kingdom greatness.

Friday Reflection: We've been looking at the times when Jesus heard his disciples arguing over which one of them would be the greatest in His Kingdom. Today we look at the last time that happened- on the day before He was crucified during the last supper.

That's right. During. The. Last. Supper.

A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. Luke 22:24-27 (NIV)

It's the last time Jesus will be with them. He wants this night to be special. He wants to leave them with something they'll never forget. And what happens? An argument over the pecking order in His Kingdom. A pecking order He has told them over and over again doesn't exist. Or if it does it's an upside down pecking order. If they had been paying attention they should have been arguing over which of them would be the least in Jesus' Kingdom (you know because the first will be last and the last will be first and the greatest will be the servant of all and the servant of all will be the greatest?).

I remember I was at a youth rally at another church once. This church was one that spent a lot of time talking about financial giving. They spent 20 minutes talking to the kids about giving money and all the blessings that come with giving. I'm not saying he meant for the kids to get this impression but basically what my teens heard was that if you give Jesus \$5 He'll give you back \$10 by the time you get home tonight. It was an unbeatable investment strategy the way he described it.

Now don't get me wrong. I believe we are blessed when we give. I believe Jesus expects us to give cheerfully and extravagantly. I believe we cannot out-give Jesus. But I do not believe the Bible promises that if I give cash that Jesus will send back double what I gave in kind. Yes I will be blessed and sometimes that might show up in financial form but there's not guarantees of that. But that's not what the kids heard. They believed this guy was saying that if they gave cash Jesus would give them back double or more TONIGHT!

Why am I telling you about this guy and his tithing lesson to my teenagers when this reflection is supposed to be about humility and the first and the last and greatest and the servant of all? Because as soon as he got done with his spiel he told the kids to come up and drop their cash in a bucket up on stage. The kids rushed to give. In fact they were pushing each other trying to be the first to drop their cash in the bucket. The guy stopped them and told them about the whole first-will-be-last-and-the-last-will-be-first thing and how pushing each other to be first would get them the opposite of what they wanted. Guess what the kids did? They started pushing others in front of them so they could be last in which case Jesus would make them first.

It was hilarious. And it was sad. And it was scary. On the way home I talked to my youth group about what the guy had said and did my best to mitigate the damage that would occur when they got home and their cash hadn't been doubled. Ok back to Jesus and the Last Supper. He's done His best to teach them about humility. He's taught and taught on the subject. He's stopped every argument they had over who would be first/greatest in His Kingdom and now this argument is threatening to destroy everything He's worked so hard for on this last night He'll be with them. So what does He do? Instead of teaching more about humility and the whole first-will-be-last-and-the-last-will-be-first thing He decided to try a different approach:

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 around 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 around him. John 13:3-5 (NLT)

On this last night with His disciples when it became painfully obvious that they just weren't getting this whole first-will-be-last-and-the-last-will-be-first thing Jesus decided to try a different approach. A living example or demonstration of humility. Do you remember how for three weeks when I was teaching on humility the points of the lesson were either that humility was incredibly gentle or that humility was incredibly powerful? This is another example of how humility in action in the life of Jesus was both gentle and powerful at the same time. Look at that last scripture again. How does it begin? With Jesus receiving back all the power that He emptied Himself of when He left heaven to be born and laid in a manger. For His entire life He lived without that power. He never performed a miracle by His own power while He walked this earth- He had to ask His Father for the power and of course any time He asked God poured out His power. But still- He was without that power throughout His entire life.

Until now.

Now He gets it all back. Why? I'm not sure. Maybe the cross wouldn't have been the same kind of sacrifice if He didn't have the power to stop it Himself at any point. I'm not sure but I do know this- He is once again the most powerful being in the universe with all the power of God at His fingertips.

What would you do? If you had all the power of God at your disposal what would you do. You want to make sure they are left with something they will never forget. It's your last night with them. After this they will be left to carry on your mission and now you see they still don't get it. What would you do with all that power and all that ignorance your disciples are showing? You want to know what Jesus did? He served.

He got up, took off His robe and washed their feet. There's a lot I don't know about- well just about everything. But I know this. When Jesus did this His disciples were SHOCKED! Foot washing was the most demeaning job in any first century household. Only a slave could be forced to wash feet. Not even a wife or a child could be commanded to wash feet. And among slaves the one washing feet was at the absolute bottom of any pecking order.

Why'd He do it? Why foot washing? And why is John the only gospel writer that shares this story? Probably because the others were too embarrassed to mention it. But by the time John writes his story of Jesus' life all the other disciples are long dead. John decides to include it because it's the most powerful part of Jesus' story that has never been told.

It's Jesus' living narrative of humility. Teaching about humility to His disciples hasn't done much so maybe this will get through to them. When He's done He tries to explain to them what just happened:

After washing their feet he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, "Do you understand what I was doing? You call me 'Master' and 'Lord,' and you do well to say it, for it is true. And since I, the Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. I have given you an example to follow: do as I have done to you... You know these things-now do them! That is the path of blessing. John 13:12-17 (TLB)

What a surreal moment that must have been. Jesus is speaking with complete confidence even after that display of such weakness and servanthood. You call Me your Lord and Master and you know what? You're absolutely right! That's exactly what I am. So if I, your Lord and Master was willing to do this then I'd say there's nothing I might ask you to do for someone else that you should believe is beneath you.

Footwashing was a job that any of the people there that night could've done but nobody was willing to do it. So Jesus did. That's humility. That's greatness (in Jesus' Kingdom).

So what does that have to do with you and me? I guess that's what each one of us has to figure out. What is Jesus asking me to do that I thought I was too good for? And if there's not something specific you're being reminded of by Jesus right now just keep this story in your hip pocket until He does ask you to do something that you don't want to do and feel like you're too good to do. Something maybe that anybody could do but nobody is doing. You know- like Jesus on His last night with His disciples who were all sitting around with dirty feet.

Jesus is awesome!