

Humility - Becoming earthed again.

Texts: Matthew 21; Philippians 2

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If you are anything like me during this time of pandemic, you find yourself oscillating between:

- self-preservation kind of selfishness, trying to swim in ongoing rising tides of stress and overwhelm, and that
- Holy Nudge, that comes at rather surprising moments (in the middle of the night or late afternoon), where we are filled with the courage to act for the greater good.

This time is calling us to a humility that is evidenced by a respectful honesty – with ourselves and with each other:

Poet David Whyte writes:

Honesty is grounded in humility and indeed in humiliation, and in admitting exactly where we are powerless. Honesty is not found in revealing the truth, but in understanding how deeply afraid of it we are. To become honest is in effect to become fully and robustly incarnated into powerlessness. Honesty allows us to live with not knowing.

In Consolations by David Whyte

Yesterday, I watched and listened to the election process of the new Bishop Elect for the Diocese of British Columbia, the Diocese of the Islands and Inlets..

And after 7 rounds of voting, The Rev Anna Greenwood Lee, emerged as the Elected Bishop – she was surprised and overwhelmed, and she gave voice to that – her opening words as she was livestreamed from Calgary were:

“I am surprised and I am overwhelmed, please bear with me”.

She doesn't sound like much of a Bishop I thought. And then I thought again...

She is giving voice to the truth of her own experience, what it means for her and her family to take on this new role, the cost, during pandemic to uproot and she is still saying yes with both honesty and humility.

That is exactly what we need in a Bishop.

Often, we are tempted to say what we think we *should* say. What others want us to say.

Humility asks something different from us.

Humility is an inner work not outer work.

Humility my friends is becoming earthed again.

The word Humility comes to us from the Latin humilis, lowly, near the ground – humus being the earth, gravity. **Brother Curtis (SSJE)**

Spirituality author Christine Valters Paintner writes that Humility is...

“remembering our own earthiness, to know that one day Sister Death will visit us as well. The desert monks and St Benedict also counseled ‘remember daily that one day you will die’

In embracing this truth we can find freedom. We begin to take ourselves and the weight of our concerns less seriously.

Humility is the practice of recognising that I am profoundly earthed. To do this I only need to ponder all the ways I am reliant on the earth for provision of food and air and sunlight. Humility reminds us that we have limitations and we can't take on everything, which also enables us to commit to something and do it very well”

In both the parable before us in the gospel and Paul's reflections on Jesus the Christ, we are called to reflect on our own spiritual practices.

We learn from Jesus on the heels of Palm Sunday and the cleansing of the temple, when he is most under pressure and challenged by the priestly elite in the very seat of power. These elites – who were trying to maintain peace with Rome – worship God as they understood God and negotiate with Roman authority under Caesar.

Jesus challenge is for us to give voice to where we are, and when we are called to action, go. Especially in a climate where 'talking the talk' is often an effective way to avoid 'walking the walk'.

Friends, sometimes changing our minds is a good step toward the Christ path of humility.

I love what Richard Rohr writes in Falling Upwards:

“Frankly, a new humility is emerging in Christianity as we begin to recognize our many major mistakes in the past, especially our tragic treatment of indigenous people in almost all the nations that Christians colonized, along with our silence about and full complicity with slavery, destructive consumerism, apartheid, white privilege, the devastation of the planet, homophobia, classism, and the Holocaust. Our dualistic logic allowed us to justify almost anything the corporate ego desired. Now we are a little less arrogant about our ability to understand – much less to actually live this Christianity of ours. And our critics are not about to

let us forget our past mistakes. The harsh judgements of humanity against the actual performance of Christianity are with us for the rest of history. All people need to do is Google, and they will know what really seems to have happened”.

On Wednesday, I will be wearing an Orange shirt as I acknowledge the pain of indigenous people.

Orange shirt day was born out of the experience of Phyllis Webstad (Northern Shuswap) She writes:

“I went to the St Joseph’s Mission in Williams Lake. I had just turned 6 years old. I lived with my grandmother on the Dog Creek reserve. We never had very much money, but somehow my granny managed to buy me a new outfit to go to the Mission school. I remember going to Robinson’s store and picking out a shiny orange shirt. It had string laced up in front, and was so bright and exciting – just like I felt to be going to school!

When I got to the Mission, they stripped me, and took away my clothes, including the orange shirt! I never wore it again. I didn’t understand why they wouldn’t give it back to me, it was mine! The color orange has always reminded me of that and how my feelings didn’t matter, how no one cared and how I felt like I was worth nothing. All of us little children were crying and no one cared”

That feeling of worthlessness and insignificance, ingrained in her from her first day at the mission, affected the way she lived her life for many years.

Let’s give orange shirts back. Dignity, respect, admission of wrong.

<https://www.orangeshirtday.org/phyllis-story.html>

Paul writes to a Christian community in Philippi who were in conflict.

He reminds them in this most beautiful ancient hymn, that to belong to community requires humility. Laying aside ourselves for the sake of the other. But oh this is so intricate isn’t it.

For it is not about self-abasement or low self-esteem, on the contrary humility calls for a growing self-awareness and a conscious choice to value the other.

The invitation to live with humility has often been used by those in power to subjugate those whose voices we do not want to hear. Or we can take on false humility and act as though we are not full of pride as a way to increase our standing.

The life of mystic Meister Eckhart (spelt with an 'h' after the k – something autocorrect didn't appreciate in the bulletin formatting!)

Living in the 13th and 14th centuries, Meister Eckhart spoke honestly and clearly about his experience of God in language that the ordinary person could understand – he had this knack to take complex ideas and make them understood. He gained popularity as a Priest in the Catholic Church of the time, in a moment in history when there was a papacy under the influence of King Philip IV – the Papacy resided in France rather than in Rome.

And after Eckhard's death (1329) the church authorities wrote of him as a heretic that "he wished to know more than he should". Undermining his words.

Yet everywhere in his work was the posture of humility:

- All life involves growth
- I can learn from the tiniest being. Even the tiniest caterpillar...
- Truly 'earthed' of humus. Humble.
- Eckardt writes:
"Humility does not build upon action. It builds inside of humans, in their being. Becoming an internal aspect of being, humility is not manifested only in external actions, as with Pharisees of Old Testament, but in every act of our being. It is not a holiness of faces. It is an internal movement. Everything becomes holy. To rest, to drink, to sleep, or to keep vigil become holy, because these actions are connected with the internal structure of a humble being."

By Adrian Ignat in Humility in the writings of Meister Eckhart and Gregory Palamas

Becoming earthed – humble – is not something we can work on directly.

Rather it is something that we receive.

For as Brother Curtis Almquist of the Society of Saint John the Evangelist says:

"Humility is like a secret that everyone knows about you, but from which you are kept in the dark"

The Twelve Days of Christmas.

But there are two practices that can lead us toward Humility:

- The practice of responding to **humiliation**: Father Richard Rohr prays for one humiliation a day – a public embarrassment. So that he can practice his response and die to his false self.
- And Brother Curtis Almquist invites us to practice a posture of **hesitation** – when we are tempted to dismiss a person because they are different from us or we think we cannot learn from them for whatever reason, hesitate – don't assuming that we have it right, seek to listen to and reverence the other.

It is in the collection of small daily acts that we change our world.

Out of the soil
Wet, peaks a dew worm.
Earth mover.

Haiku Isabella Mori in a bagful of haiku, 87 imperfections.