

## IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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The Reverend David J. Powers  
Sunday, March 8, 2026

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As we prepare to shift now to the hearing, the reading, and the proclamation of God's word, I invite you to take a couple of deep breaths with me. Get comfortable in your pews. Maybe close your eyes or take whatever prayer posture is right for you and take a deep breath in with me.

Breathe it out slowly. Another deep breath in, and breathe it out slowly.

Breathe in God's mercies and breathe out God's mercies to others. Breathe in God's mercies and breathe out God's mercies to others.

Gracious spirit, you are as close to us as our very next breath. So we pray that you would dwell within us and around us in these moments. That you might quiet any voice within us but your own. That we might hear your word for us and indeed for your church this day. And that in hearing we might be called to lead lives of response. So may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, God, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

If you are joining us for the first time in this season of Lent, you might not be aware that we are making our way through a sermon series entitled Marks of a Disciple. We believe that those who call upon the name of Christ as they move through the world, they present differently by the marks that they carry with them. And we have been wrestling over the last couple weeks with a couple of those marks. This morning, the mark that we will examine is that of humility, which Whitney introduced to our children just a little bit ago. Philippians, chapter 2 is going to ground our exploration of humility. But I think it's important for us to understand how critically important this particular mark is for us, for those who call upon the name of Christ, in this particular time in the life of our country and the world. Augustine of Hippo said this. "If you ask me what is the first virtue of Christian religion, I will answer—humility. If you ask me what is the second, I will answer—humility. And if you ask me what is the third, I will answer—humility." With the grounding of one of the most influential theologians of the early church, let us turn our attention to Philippians, chapter 2:verses 1 through 13. Let us listen together for God's word to each of us and indeed to the church this day.

*If then there is any comfort in Christ, any consolation from love, any partnership in the spirit, any tender affection and sympathy, make my joy complete. Be of the same mind, having the same love, being of full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interest, but to the interest of others.*

*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,*

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*who though he existed in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be grasped,  
but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
assuming human likeness.  
And being found in human appearance,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death,  
even death on a cross.  
Therefore, God exalted him even more highly  
and gave him the name  
that is above every other name,  
so that at the name of Jesus,  
every knee should bend  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord  
to the glory of God the Father.*

*Therefore, beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for God's good pleasure.*

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our Lord endures forever. Amen.

So this mark of humility, if we are to rightly examine it as a mark of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, I believe it's appropriate, or important at least, for us to return to the beginning of the story, the beginning of the story of God in the book of Genesis in the Garden of Eden, we meet a couple important characters, one of which is Adam. Adam is instructed to enjoy the garden and yet, to not eat of the fruit of the tree, the knowledge of good and evil. This action would transfer to Adam a sort of knowledge and wisdom that is held only by God, the creator.

And yet, as we know, Adam does eat of that fruit. And in so doing, he seeks to have the same mind as God. He attempts to possess wisdom and power, which only God can possess.

Theologians will tell you, though, that Adam's fall was not primarily about appetite. It was about self-exaltation, wanting to be like God without God. Many would repeatedly argue that it is, in

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fact, the original sin of pride and arrogance that serve as humanity's fundamental disorders. Pride and arrogance. And they use Adam and this scene as the primary example of this. But of course we worship a gracious God. So if there is a sin, then there is also a remedy, a balm, something that can heal that sin. For those who call upon the name of Jesus and especially for Paul, Christ is the medicine for pride and arrogance. More specifically, Christ's ministry, his life, his modeling of humility, serves as the remedy for the sin of arrogance and pride.

This is something that Philippians 2 unpacks. As humanity sins by grasping upward, Christ redeems, Paul says, by descending downward. Christ's incarnation and crucifixion reveal something greater, a divine strategy. God defeats pride and arrogance through humility. That is the model that is outlined for us in the ministry of Jesus Christ. While other methods, other methods of power are lifted up in the world, it is only through the self-giving love of Christ that pride and arrogance are defeated. Augustine says, "Do you wish to rise? Begin by descending. You plan a tower that will pierce the clouds? Lay first the foundation of humility." This mark of discipleship, this mark of humility is an invitation to those who call upon the name of Jesus. It's an invitation to participate in the humility of Christ. The Christian life is a participation in Christ's own humility. Humility that we can embody as those who call upon the name of Jesus is one that lifts up several critical truths that our lives are not self-made, our salvation not self-earned, transformation that is brought to each of us and into the world not self-powered. For Paul, humility is not just imitation of Christ, but participation. Paul believes that the Philippians and all those who will believe in Christ are drawn into Christ's humility by grace. That's why he says in verse 5, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus." That word mind needs to be paid attention to this day.

Professor Jane Lancaster Patterson points out that the Greek verb that shapes this whole reading is *phroneo*. *Phroneo* means to have a depth of understanding and practical wisdom, to know how to act rightly, especially in confusing and complex circumstances. Paul uses this verb twice in Philippians 2:2, and then it becomes the governing verb of the so-called Christ hymn which is verses 5- 11. What's interesting for us as modern hearers of the word is that English does not have a verb like this. English does not have a verb like *phroneo*. So more often than not, it is translated as having a certain mind toward things. Here, where Paul is stressing the need for unity, it shows up as being of the same mind, being of one mind. "Let this mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus." But turning the verb *phroneo* into the noun mind loses the kind of fully embodied wisdom gained over time and experience and participation that's really at stake here. *Phroneo* is action. It is discipleship. It is participating in the movement of God.

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And Paul knew that phroneo, being of the same mind as Christ, would be critically important to the Philippians because of the place where they found themselves, because of the community that surrounded them. We let y'all know last week that Philippians were Roman citizens. They enjoyed all the trappings of that citizenry. They also endured them. They were surrounded by all the trappings of Caesar. Gold adorning the walls of the government spaces. Decrees made from on high, uninterested in the voice of the people. Surrounded on all sides, the Philippians were, by fear masquerading as power, pride and arrogance taking the chief place in the public square.

And Paul knew that for the Philippians, they would need to know that this is where the path of Christ diverges from the path that they were experiencing in their world. Paul says that the world teaches you to climb higher and build bigger and adorn your places of worship with more gold to make your name known. But in Jesus Christ, God reveals something incredibly different and transformational. The son of God did not climb toward glory. Indeed, he stepped downward into service, into suffering, and onto the cross. And Paul says, "Let that same phroneo be in you." That is what you are called to do. In the face of pride and arrogance, in face of the original sin, You are called to lead lives of humility.

But do not fret, because humility will lead you to something that you cannot even yet imagine.

Humility will indeed lead to a path of salvation. Humility was not just a virtue that Jesus taught or embodied. It was a way. It was the way God chose to save the world. On the cross, we see the chief image of humility. The one who has taken on flesh, taken on the captivity of the flesh, pierced and killed. The cross ultimately becomes the fullest revelation that God conquers, not through domination, through pride, or through arrogance, but through self-giving love. For Christ, humility was paradoxical because it was also the path to salvation. And the same is true in the kingdom of God. The way down becomes the way up. And Philippians 2 holds up this pattern before each of us as disciples of Jesus. "Therefore, God exalted Christ even more highly and gave him the name that is above every name. So that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bend in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."

Humility will ultimately and finally defeat arrogance and pride. The humble shall be lifted up, but the struggle will be long and it will be painful.

Yet, it will happen, because it is God's will in Christ Jesus.

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The calling of scripture is for the Christian and for the church of Jesus Christ in this age to carry the mark of humility. I find myself convinced that of all the marks that we have and will study in this season of Lent, perhaps there is not one more important for the Christian to model in this specific moment in history.

Humility is the mark of a disciple because it is the shape of Jesus's life.

A disciple begins to look like Christ when they stop venerating status and start stooping to serve. We stop trusting in fear and pride and arrogance masquerading as power and instead trust in God for the lifting up.

If you were to ask me what is the first virtue of the Christian religion, I would paraphrase Augustine. Humility. If you would ask me a second time, I would answer again—humility. And if you were to ask me a third time, I would answer again—humility.

Perhaps there is no more countercultural way for a disciple marked by Christ to move through the world than with the humble heart of our servant savior.

So this day I invite you to hear the call of Paul to the Philippians as your call, Paul's call to each of you as well, that you might not simply have the same *phroneo* as a noun but as it was originally intended as a verb. That the way that you move through the world might change. Your actions, your postures, your treatment of neighbor and nature might be shaped, even partnered with the humility of God made known in Christ Jesus.

And may you trust and may you believe that it is in that humility that indeed God will be glorified.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, Mother of us all. Amen.