

## **“Incarnation: A Lesson in Humility”**

1 John 3:11-18; Philippians 2:1-11 – Tesa Hauser  
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*Holy God, bless the speaking and the hearing of these words, that we may be encouraged by the example provided to us by Christ. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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In the first sermon of this series, Pastor Rebecca talked about the specifics of the person of Jesus. To think about the physical and cultural aspects of Jesus and to think about who we are specifically, and to lean into that so we can be used by God to spread love and mercy and justice. I want to go in a somewhat similar direction today. Have you ever thought about Jesus' personality?

In my experience, Jesus is most viewed or described as soft spoken, expressionless, and stoic. He speaks, but his eyebrows barely move, there are no lines around his mouth. His movements are slow, but thoughtful. Except for that one time in the temple where he just happens to knock all the tables over. It was this one moment where he was so overcome with emotion that he deviates from his typical demeanor. Jesus is seen as so pious that he doesn't really have a personality, but in reading the Gospels, there is no denying that he is quite the character.

Well, I'm not sure if I've mentioned enough that my Jesus is sassy. Yes, sassy Jesus was incredibly passionate in the way he spoke and expressed his emotions. He often teeters on being sarcastic and is sometimes probably too loud.

When he laughs, it's almost always a deep belly laugh that you can hear from another room. We know Jesus wept, but I don't think it was merely tears streaming down his face. I think everyone around him knew he wept, for they could hear his audible sobs and sniffles.

There is so much in the scriptures that tell us about the personality of Jesus, and I think we may overlook it or ignore it to not think about our own humanity, or the humanity of those who have hurt us, or annoy us, or those we compare ourselves to, or fill in the blank. To think about the humanity of Jesus is to confront ourselves, and I don't know about you, but I don't really want to do that. To think about the humanity of Jesus, may make us realize where we fall short, where we are not enough, or it may lead to apathy. Why try if I can't attain Jesus' status? Or it may make us realize that we don't really get Jesus or know Jesus, or it can cause us to question our faith, and that can be scary. All these feelings, questions, thoughts, and emotions are valid.

Then, while these thoughts are swirling in our head, we may read a passage like Philippians 2, and it can further heighten those worries, fears, and questioning. Understandably so since the meat of the passage is verses 5 through 11, which talks about Jesus emptying himself and being so humble and obedient to the point of death, and then being exalted by God. I mean, how are we supposed to relate?

Do we want to relate? Let us take a few steps back to the very first thing Paul says in verses one through four of Philippians chapter 2.

At the end of Philippians chapter 1, Paul is talking to the church at Philippi bringing encouragement from prison, that following Jesus may result in some struggles since there are those who oppose them in their efforts. Paul continues in chapter two, reminding the church that there is some comfort to be found in following Jesus. Where is that comfort found? In the body of Christ! Pun intended. In you personally, as a member of the body, and in the communities who claim, follow, believe, worship the living God, God incarnate, the Word who was made flesh.

For what, as verse five mentions, does it mean to have “the same mind in you that was in Christ Jesus?” We know from multiple places in scripture that Jesus is aware of his position in this life, aware of his humanity and *divinity*. The prophecies spoken about him when he was born, his moment in the temple at a very young age, the temptation in the wilderness, his ability to turn water into wine, his miraculous healings – Jesus knows. The commentary I read stated plainly, “Equality with God was something that Christ already possessed, but which he chose not to use for his own advantage.” Jesus refused to exploit his rights, in his self-emptying, and in his self-humiliation, in his obedience of not possessing equality to the point of death on a cross.

Jesus is the revelation of the divine, his birth, ministry, and death provide insight like never before into God's character. Jesus did not lose his divinity when becoming human, and yet as human, can identify with our situation. Christ's humility allows for a special revelation and reconciliation to God. We are mere mortals, made of flesh and bone, easily broken and prone to selfishness. The Son of God born in weakness and humility and accepting poverty and vulnerability, allows God to reveal God's self-giving love for humanity in the birth of God's son. The Incarnation is humility in action, it is truth in action, it is love in action.

So again, I ask, what does it mean to have "the same mind in you that was in Christ Jesus?" How do we find comfort in Christ, when confronting our own humanity? We should not be looking for status or power, nor act from "selfish ambition or empty conceit," but focus on mutual concern and service. Jesus died as a result of humbling himself and pushing against the need for power and selfish ambition. Eating with tax collectors, letting his feet be touched by the hair of a woman seen as sinful, asking those who are blameless to cast the first stone to a woman "caught in adultery." Not following the status quo, not shutting up, and upholding those in power who proclaimed to care and love those whom God cares and loves for, and then doing the opposite.

Paul does not provide specifics on how Christians are to live and show obedience. There are no "rules," but responding in an appropriate way to the self-

giving love of God found in Christ. Again, the humility and obedience expected of Christians are rooted in the humility and obedience of Christ. This means living out what Christ proclaimed and how Christ lived, as John 13:34-35 mentions, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

It is then even more humbling to hear the words of 1 John, where it says that if you even hate your sibling, you are a murderer. Then 1 John 3:17 says, “How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?” Verse 18 then exhorts us to not just love with empty words, but in deed and truth. The truth is the Incarnation and as I mentioned earlier, it is the prime example of love in action, and we must respond accordingly. Let us discuss our response.

The Church talks about unity, as if every shared idea, action, or that even our personalities must align in unnatural and uncanny ways. Humility isn’t meant to foster false modesty or lack of self-esteem but to encourage a recognition of rights and achievements of others. Sometimes humility is realizing that we don’t always know what is right or best, or that we even understand what humility or unity means or looks like. “But Tesa,” you may ask, “what happens when I am right, or I was correct in offering the best solution/response/etc.?” Practice Christ-like

humility. With compassion and love, guide people, and encourage people. You may stand firm in your position with grace and kindness, and then, if it still doesn't go your way or the "right way," you still practice grace and kindness. There are more moments of Jesus asking open-ended questions and allowing people to not get it right, than there are flipping tables.

Knowing the personality of Jesus, do we think it was easy for him to humble himself daily, when he could attain the power, influence, and status given his equality to God? Jesus does not compromise on his personality, but also does the work to make sure that he humbles himself. We've assumed that his divinity won all the time, but I imagine his life was a constant struggle in humility. Humility is not a personality trait, it may come easier to some more than others, but like love, it's a choice. That is why we find comfort in Jesus, for he understands that when given the chance for humility it is not the easy choice. And his decision, I would argue, was harder to make.

Humility, as mentioned earlier is not false modesty or lack of self-esteem, it is being able to know who you are to know what you can offer. It means knowing when you should get out of your own way or the ways of others. It requires a self-awareness to know that though you *think* you may have the best solution or right answer, it doesn't mean it's the best course of action. Humility means offering what we have and being okay if it's not accepted or welcomed in that moment.

Humility is learning to “do nothing from selfish ambition or empty conceit” and looking “not to your own interests but to the interests of others.” It is knowing your personality and how it interacts with those around you.

Humility is living out the truth of the Incarnation in action. So how do we live it out? Is it in your tithes and offering to the church, or donating to a cause like the Trevor Project that provides suicide prevention efforts among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning youth? Is it calling or writing to your politicians to make sure that maternal health care becomes a priority when so many women, especially Black women, suffer or even die from a lack of pre- and post-natal care? Is it reposting or liking Vista La Mesa’s social media posts so that others may find a place of worship or denomination that will show them God’s love? For Love came down and lived among us, and every day chose humility. Alleluia and Amen.