

I was sitting in the kitchen this past Wednesday evening, reading a book. Sam was doing his homework at the kitchen table. Joan was walking Zipper around the block, and Spencer was at his girlfriend's house, pitching woo. It was my favorite part of the day, around 8:30 and just getting dark, when a large bat with what appeared to be a six-foot wingspan flew out of our dining room, looped around the kitchen several times to make sure we'd see it, then headed upstairs to hide underneath our covers and bite us in the night.

Joan has always been so good with animals. Animals love her. She walks into a room and they come right up to her. I guess they sense her kind heart. So I got in the car and went to find her, because I knew she wouldn't want me to get rid of the bat without giving her the chance to see it first. I found her a couple of blocks away and brought her home. She went inside to see the bat. I really wanted to go with her, but I had to go visit my parents and spend the night at their house, so I did that, and when I came home the next morning, Joan had encouraged the bat to leave. This was the fourth bat in our house in two weeks, so I've been spending quite a lot of time at my parent's house. They're older now and needing my assistance, so I'm trying to be a thoughtful, attentive son.

Joan was telling Jenny Settles about it and they were laughing at me and calling me a bat wimp. That would bother most men, but I have no pride whatsoever. I have made my peace with ineptitude and fear. Most men have a deep need to be respected for their masculinity, but not me. I am a humble Christian who isn't afraid to admit his wife is braver than he is, which is why I married her. She's also great with mice.

Thus, I am qualified to speak on this morning's topic—humility. I have no pride left. I am utterly and thoroughly meek, and will one day inherit the earth, though someone will probably take it away from me. And I'm fine with that, too. They can have it.

We've been talking the qualities of the spiritual life. We've talked about *gratitude*, how gratefulness gives us a deepened awareness of God and a deepened appreciation for others.

We spoke about *reflection*, about regularly asking ourselves “What did I learn from that experience?”

We talked about *spiritual pacing or being present in the moment*—not hurrying through one experience so we can get on to something else we think might be more pleasant.

And last week we thought about *mercy*, the compassion we extend to others when we have the power, and perhaps even a compelling reason, to be otherwise.

Today, I would like for us to think about *humility*. One of the best definitions I ever heard of humility was one I recently read in the *Rolling Stone* magazine. My brother-in-law subscribes to that magazine and would pass them on to our 91-year-old mother-in-law, Ruby Apple, who, before she died, would pass them on to me. Ruby Apple reading *Rolling Stone*. So there was an interview in there with Scott Weiland, who was a member of the rock band, the Stone Temple Pilots. He'd been arrested for possession of drugs and sent to prison. After he was released, he was interviewed and during the interview he kept using the word *humility*. The reporter interviewing him asked him to define *humility* and Scott Weiland said, "It's not me thinking less of myself. It's me thinking of myself less."

It's not me thinking less of myself. It's me thinking of myself less.

In the long history of the Judeo-Christian faith, humans have not always fared well. We were told we were born into sin and had fallen short of God's glory. In the book of Job, Job's friend, Bildad, asked, "How can a man be righteous before God? How can one born of woman be pure? If even the moon is not bright and the stars are not pure in God's eyes, how much less man, who is but a maggot—a son of man, who is only a worm!" (Job 25:4-6) Then Job responded by saying, "Yeah, we're pretty much powerless, weak, and stupid." (Job 26:1-3)

This is called worm theology, and many of us are well-acquainted with it. It goes like this—for God to be great, we have to be nothing. And because we are nothing, because we are worms, God has to intervene and save us. This is why so many Christians are beaten down. You grow up hearing this Sunday after Sunday and after awhile you have this inner wound, this warped sense of self. And the church said that was good because it kept us from being prideful and helped us be humble.

But that understanding of humility is not what I'm urging you to embrace. That isn't humility, that is debasement, and a complete contradiction of true human worth and value. Humility doesn't say, "I am a worm. I am worth nothing." Humility says, "I have value, but so does everyone else. Therefore I will not elevate myself at the expense of anyone else. I will not knock down you to lift up me."

Humility is not me thinking less of myself. It's me thinking of myself less. So I can also think of others.

But humility not only permits us to draw closer to others, it permits us to draw closer to God.

Monica Baldwin was a nun who lived in an isolated convent for 28 years. But after only a few years, she began to think she'd made a mistake, writing in her journal, "I am no more fitted to be a nun than I am an acrobat." When she finally left the convent, she wrote about her experiences in a book called *I Leap Over The Wall: A Return to the World after Twenty-eight Years in a Convent*. In that book she wrote, "What makes humility so desirable is the marvelous thing it does to us; it creates in us a capacity for the closest possible intimacy with God."

Humility is not me thinking less of myself. It's me thinking of myself less. So I can also think of others. And also think of God.

Pride thinks well only of the self. Humility not only lets us think well of ourselves. It lets us think well of others and think well of God.