Our Scriptures these September Sundays are nudging us to re-define some of the key words in our Christian vocabulary. Last week, we stared the word “faith” in the eye… remembering that the words we confess with our lips are God’s call to action to share with others the love of Jesus Christ. What we believe is hardwired to how we live.

**Humility**, like faith, has fallen on hard times. Shamefully, I must say that I certainly haven’t seen a truly heartfelt message of humility from any Bishop or member of the hierarchy! …Social media sites lure us into conversations with friends and strangers that focus on ourselves. Look at the worldwide phenomenon of photos, posts, and accomplishments…bragging about our accomplishments. Twitter encourages users to tell followers what they think—often unfiltered—and what they are doing—(do we really want to know?) Some politicians traffic in pride, boasting, with a “me-centric” attitude that has
voters asking themselves whether the common man and woman in our country even matters any more.

What’s happened to an authentic, winsome, generous humility? What does Christian humility look like? Jesus and his disciples have left the high ground of Caesarea Philippi and are now back in the fishing village of Capernaum. Along the way, his men have surely questioned him about what will happen as he leads them from Galilee south …to an appointment with the cross in Jerusalem. A second time, he tells them that suffering, rejection, death and resurrection waits for him there. Still they do not understand. …Do we?????

Now back home, Jesus asks the disciples why they were arguing amongst themselves about who was the greatest. Mark does not give any color to the word “greatest,” but we can imagine the substance of those arguments. Perhaps Peter was feeling proud that his Lord had told him the Church would be built on the rock of his life and faith. Maybe James and John were drunk with pride because they, along with Peter, had been
with Jesus when he was transfigured with Moses and Elijah. The other
nine disciples may have felt left out, even ignored. The murmuring was
deafening!

Aware of this festering conflict among his men, Jesus sits down
and tells them, “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and
the servant of all.” He then has a child stand in their midst as an example
of humility. “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name
welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the
one who sent me.” The child, simply standing in that small, stone-walled
room of men, was the parable. By example, humility—generous
humility—has no better witness than the innocence, wonder, and
uncomplicated beauty of a child.

The church where James was pastor was having its own struggle
with what he calls “envy and selfish ambition.” As witnessed in our
lesson from a couple of weeks ago, a dangerous favoritism had edged its
way into the community. “Quarrels and fights” had broken out in the
fellowship. Though we have but these hints as to the severity of the problem, some in that church had forgotten that humility is the hallmark of being a follower of Jesus. I heard it said well: “Anytime God’s people develop a pecking order, someone has missed the message of Jesus.”

The larger Christian community in our country and perhaps the developed world seems to be at a crossroads. The millennial generation, in large part, has written off the Church. Political leaders seem eager to use the Church when convenient while ignoring the Gospel’s demands to care for widows and orphans, the immigrant and stranger, the sick and the needy.

James named the disease of “me-ism” in his church noting that some in the congregation asked God for blessings only to use those good gifts on themselves. Could James be holding up a mirror from the first century and magically…. we see both our present and a not-so promising future?
What is God saying to us? Is it possible to invert the Gospel story, so rooted in sacrifice and love, and make it all about me and us? Both Jesus and James point the way forward. Humility, wrote James, is rooted in a “wisdom that comes from heaven” that is “peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy, and good fruit, impartial and sincere.”

The way forward, to use our Lord’s example, is to remember yet again that authentic greatness, generous humility always moves gently, lovingly, thoughtfully in the direction of others. As we learned last week, faith is not a consumer product to be used on ourselves. Yes, we are saved by grace through faith. Yes, in God’s loving kindness, we have received the gift of eternal life whose way is love and whose power is generosity. Yes, we are God’s children now and forever.

Such wondrous truths, such amazing gifts, however are ours in sacred trust. A generous humility acknowledges that we do not possess grace as much as we are its stewards. God gifts us with his mercy for
one reason: that we will be a blessing to others. Take a moment to inventory the brothers and sisters you know or have known who embody the life and teachings of Jesus. You will discover that every face in your gallery of memories, every example they have shown by their lives of service is focused on others. Our Lord reminds us that anytime we stub our toe thinking the Christian faith is about us, we would be wise to get around some children and see again how generously humble they are.

A second gift bubbles up from our Scriptures when we accept the fact that the story in which we find ourselves has a past, a present, and a future. Christian history didn’t begin with our baptism and won’t end with our death. Just as the Gospel is not about me, so this wondrous story of God’s love for the entire world transcends the years each of us will use up in the span of life. Our Lord’s life, death and resurrection was not the end, but the beginning of God’s presentation of good news into the human story. James admonished his church to check their selfishness and pride …. He begged them to be aware that how they expressed the faith would affect generations yet unborn.
What does that mean for us? At the very least, this **awareness of how temporary life is summons us to be a people who bow in humble gratitude before the gifts we have been given**. God’s word is both **telling** and **showing us** that the way to change our world is to love it. Mimic Jesus Christ by being God’s people of generous humility.

When we are **peace-loving**, we invite others to find the peace only God can give. When we are **full of mercy** in the face of hatred and bigotry, we show our Lord’s way of love is indeed the way of life. When we are **impartial and sincere**, we acknowledge what the founders of this great country enshrined in the Declaration of Independence that “all are created equal.” Such is the way of life, the way of the love, the generous humility shown us by Jesus in his life, his death, his resurrection, and his presence in our midst even now. When was the last time we demonstrated **true humility**?