

**Southport Presbyterian Church**  
**Rev. June Barrow**  
**March 15, 2009**

**Attitudes of a Disciple**  
**Philippians 2:1-11**

Here is an update about one of our members, Cindy Gilbert. Cindy joined SPC about four years ago and she attended both the Great Banquet and the Alpha Course, and that's how some of you here today met her. Last July Cindy called one day to ask for prayer. She said that the next day she would be meeting, along with children and a close friend, with a neurologist who would give her a final diagnosis for the symptoms she had been experiencing. She said she already knew that the doctor was going to tell her she had Lou Gehrig's disease, ALS, a devastating diagnosis. Because Cindy is a nurse, she knew exactly what the disease means.

Well, the Church is the Church and some of our SPC folks began helping Cindy. Some of you mowed her lawn and did yard work. Some cleaned her house.

One morning last fall, sitting in Cindy's office, she mentioned that she was having trouble using her arms. I looked at her fluffy blond hair and said, "You use a curling iron every morning, don't you?" She said she did. I asked her if she'd like some women from the church to come and style her hair each morning. She liked that idea. So some women from our congregation have taken turns doing Cindy's hair. May I say that this is one of those rare moments when being a female pastor is handy? Pastor Kevin and Pastor Steve would have had no clue.

Well, the Church is the Church. Cindy has some old family friends who now live in Alabama. When they heard of Cindy's news, they urged her to come to them, so that she could live with them and they could care for them. The mother of this family had cared for a quadriplegic son until his death and she assured Cindy that there was nothing that could happen to Cindy that would frighten her. So Cindy now lives with those friends in Alabama. Let's keep praying for Cindy and I'm going to tell you about more about her later on. Let's pray.

How are your knees today? If you are young, you probably never give them a thought. But some of you are very aware of your knees. When you bend, you can hear them. When you stand, they may hurt. When you sit, they grow stiff. Some of you are waiting to get new knees.

*Strengthen those feeble hands and steady those weak knees.* Do you remember those words? They are a call to God's people and they appear in both the Old and New Testament – in Isaiah and in Hebrews. We need strong hands to live a courageous and intentional life, to do the work God has given us. We need steady knees that can stand firm when we must and can move in obedience when we are called.

We also need knees strong and steady enough to bend, to bend in worship and humility, to bend before a Holy God who deserves and desires our worship and our service, our lives and our selves. We bend the knee before the truth that Almighty God is God and that we are not.

A disciple's life is a truthful life. So, discipleship begins with a posture, a reverent posture of bending the knee, an acknowledgment that we are under authority.

We bend the knee before God, our Maker, the Creator of all that is seen and unseen. This God is the sovereign Lord, the Lord of history, and his purposes will prevail. God will use all of human history, all of our own actions, for his own purposes, plans, and for his glory. He will have his way. He will have the final say.

We bend the knee before Jesus, God's Son, our Lord and Savior, the center of Christian faith, whose life still puzzles us, whose teachings amaze and trouble us, who turned loving, healing, and blessing eyes to people others thought worthless, who turned sharp words of rebuke to people who believed they had God, themselves and everyone else all figured out.

We bend the knee before God the Holy Spirit, who called you and me to faith in God, who is using you and me and this congregation right now, who guides us into the future God plans for us, who is with us to help us, strengthen us, remind us, heal us, and fill us with real power for God's glory.

This posture of bending the knee – it's a "yes" to the truth of God's reality, to the truth of his nature and character, power and sovereignty.

It's all Good News. Orientation to the truth about who God is, who we are, that we are sinners, that we are made and seen and known and loved by God, that our salvation has been provided for, that we can come home to God and rest there, entirely secure. This is recognition of what is real, of what is true. It's fundamentally realistic. Listen to two sentences that Dorothy Sayers once wrote:

*It is fatal to let people suppose that Christianity is only a mode of feeling; it is vitally necessary to insist that it is first and foremost a rational explanation of the universe. It is hopeless to offer Christianity as a vaguely idealistic aspiration of a simple and consoling kind; it is, on the contrary, a hard, tough, exacting, and complex doctrine, steeped in a drastic and uncompromising realism. (Dorothy Sayers, in *Creed or Chaos*)*

Do you hear her meaning? Primarily Christian faith is a recognition of what really is; it's an orientation to reality – that God rules the world, that though we'd like to, we don't. It's a bending of the knee to truth, truth of the most basic and fundamental kind; it's a bending of the knee to reality.

"You will know the truth and the truth will set you free"... Remember those words of Jesus? The truth does set us free – free from the dreadful prison of self-absorption and

self-seeking. The truth sets us free to see, with reverence, the value and beauty of all the people God has made and loves. It sets us free to serve other people with humility and generosity. It just sets us free.

Listen to what Paul wrote to the Philippians. This is from chapter two:

**If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.**

**Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:  
Who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,  
but made himself nothing,  
taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.  
And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to death—  
even death on a cross!**

**Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
and gave him the name that is above every name,  
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
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.**

Bending the knee before God is a humble posture, a posture of humility. Humility is a great freedom. When we can know who we are before God, we are free to stop our cycle of self-absorption and can learn more and more to look to the will of God and to the good and the needs of others, as Jesus did.

**A disciple is humble.**

Recently, a very nice man named Ed who is part of another congregation told me that when he joined his church several years ago, he said to a pastor, “What’s the dirtiest job in the church? What’s the job no one else wants to do? I’ll do that.” The pastor said there was a particular Sunday school class that no one wanted to teach. I won’t tell you what age group that was; you can make your own guess. Ed has now been teaching that class for fifteen years, and he talks about it with joy and a big smile.

That's humility: The job no one else wants, I'll do it. The person others aren't seeing, I'll go talk to her. The clean-up job that gets left for others, I'll stay and help. The person who is trying to be heard, I'll be quiet so he can speak. The person who is discouraged by setbacks, I'll stick by him. The person who believes she is the only sinner in the room; I'll let her know that I've needed God's grace too.

Humility acknowledges our proper place in the world, that God is God and is to be honored and obeyed and that all the people God has made have worth and dignity that I must respect.

### **A disciple is obedient.**

Humility produces obedience; they are linked. In John chapter 5, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does." Jesus looked to his Father and obeyed all that he was asked to do. He looked always to his Father, following and obeying what he was asked to do. As our scripture say, "Jesus chose obedience, even to the point of death on a cross." A disciple obeys. A disciple understands that in all matters, we seek the will of God. We seek to do the next right thing.

### **A disciple is intentional.**

Notice that even in the humble obedience of Jesus, the verbs Paul uses are active, not passive verbs. Jesus *took the nature of a servant, he humbled himself, he obeyed*. Even in the humility of serving, these are choices, actions. This humility and obedience are not passive, but intentional. They are choices made with dignity and honor.

Elsewhere scripture supports this idea. In **John 10**, Jesus says: **"I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."**

Discipleship is not passive. I read a quote once that I've remembered: "There is a dullness that overshadows a passive person." Here it is again, "There is a dullness that overshadows a passive person." And Friends, when we do not respond to the promptings of God, the dullness grows. Dorothy Sayers talked of this:

*In the world sloth calls itself tolerance; but in hell it is called despair. It is the accomplice of every other sin and their worst punishment. It is the sin that believes in nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, loves nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing and remains alive only because there is nothing it would die for. (Dorothy Sayers, "The Other Six Deadly Sins")*

And this is our world today, a culture where "not minding" had become a virtue.

Jesus overcame this sin too, and showed us how to live intentional and courageous lives. Our human nature and human history do not give us a way out of despair, but Jesus does. In **Romans 5**, Paul says it like this: **Just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.** That one act of righteousness was the central act of human history, the heart of Christian faith – the obedience that led Jesus to a cross.

### **A disciple is courageous.**

Disciples are inspired to acts of courage born of commitment to God. “Such courage does not call us to do the impossible but faithfully and selflessly to do what we can when we might have chosen otherwise.” (Greg Manalli)

Courage and boldness are linked to humility. Do you see the connection between deep humility and genuine courage? Because we are living a realistic life – living a life under the authority of the Almighty and Eternal God, we know that we are the beloved and called people of God, called to repentance and to truth telling, called to live free and forgiven, called to forgive and bless and heal and encourage. Because we know who the Lord is and who we are, we are free to honor others, to live generous and sacrificial lives.

This humility of knowing that we are not God sets us free and calls us to bold and courageous living, the very opposite of passivity. Standing in the truth that Almighty God is Almighty God leads us to humility, which leads us to obedience, which leads to an intentional life, which leads to a courageous life.

And so we bend the knee, we acknowledge that we are under authority, the authority of a great God and the authority of His Word, the Bible, we become more free, not less. We are set free from the self-absorbed insistence that our opinion is on a par with God’s, that our lives are ours to do with as we please. Jesus was exceptionally free! He was free from needing the approval of others. He lived for an audience of one – his Father. When you choose to bow the knee to the authority of the Eternal God and to live under the authority of the Word of God, you don’t end up bowing the knee in other places. This is the power of humility; it yields radical freedom and allows us to live courageous lives.

Now, there is a chosen discipleship. We can choose to live, the best we can, a life of discipleship. But there is so much in life we don’t choose. At a women’s Great Banquet, Madelyn Glidden gave a talk about being a disciple. She talked about choosing a life as a disciple, but then she said there came into her life a path she would never have chosen – breast cancer. And Madelyn discovered that though she didn’t want it, even a journey through cancer was part of her walk of discipleship.

Perhaps you have a path of discipleship to walk that you would not choose. If you’ve lost a job or know financial loss as so many here do, if you’re facing illness or a broken relationship or family trouble, along those paths too, you can walk with Jesus. A disciple’s life is your real life. “Until you have given up your self to Him you will not have a real self.” (C. S. Lewis)

A disciple's life is a truthful life, a humble life, an obedient life, an intentional life, a courageous life.

Back to Cindy Gilbert. A couple of weeks ago I was reading her online journal and saw the words "kidney retrieval." I don't know what that term means, so I emailed her and asked if she has another medical complication. "Oh no," she said, "I am hoping to donate a kidney. If I wait until the end of my life, my organs will be of no value, but I asked if I could donate a kidney now and my doctors think I can." Cindy is now going through all the protocols to see if she can be a Good Samaritan donor, and in fact hopes to donate a kidney soon. What do you think of that?

Cindy is on a path of discipleship she would never have chosen, yet she is walking that path as a disciple. She is walking that path truthfully, humbly, obediently, intentionally and with great courage and self-giving love. That's the disciple's walk.

Hear this benediction; strengthen *those feeble hands and steady those weak knees*. Go out and be the Church of Jesus Christ.