

In 1980, Mac Davis scored his first top ten single with the song, "It's Hard to be Humble." Here's part of the chorus: "O Lord, it's hard to be humble/when you're perfect in every way/I can't wait to look in the mirror/cause I get better looking each day..."

What makes the song so funny is that the character in the song really believes it. He's bought into his own hype. The song is clearly done tongue-in-cheek, but why do we laugh? I don't think we're just laughing at the character. Comedy is all about surprise; and we might be surprised someone would come right out and be so arrogant. But humor is different. Humor is built on recognition. Humor is looking at a situation or a character and coming to the conclusion that 'I do that too.' Could it be that Mac Davis was bold enough to say what most of us just think? It's no secret that the human race has a pride problem.

Pride is so irresistible and so insidious that it even twists our attempts at humility into something else. As soon as our hearts go in the direction of "Look how humble I am! Look at how much of a servant I am," the whole thing is ruined. Humility does not advertise itself. What a struggle this is! Although we are often proud and want to control others, our Savior Jesus calls you and me to be humble and to serve other people, just as He humbled Himself for us.

Imagine with me that it is the night that Jesus was betrayed. It's a few days after the ugly scene when Mrs. Zebedee came to Jesus and asked that her two sons be given positions of honor in His cabinet. Now they were all in the Upper Room where the Passover was to be celebrated. The realization came that somebody had to take on the servant's role, because their feet had to be washed before eating. Nobody moved. The food was getting cold. The one who moved would be the doormat, the fool, the loser. The servant would give up his claim to rule over the others.

Finally, someone did move. Jesus took a towel and a bowl, knelt down, and began washing their feet one by one. He did the task of a slave. And, so there could be no doubt about why he was doing this, he told them, "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."

A couple sits in a counselor's office, arms folded, looking away from each other, saying nothing, because they know someone has to speak. Someone has to give in, and giving in means failure, admission of guilt, humiliation, and losing. A woman walks into the church and sees the flowers neatly arranged by another member of the congregation. She arranges them flowers the way she would like them. Power. Control.

A man talks to a few friends and cons them into voting for the person he wants as head of a committee. Power. Control. A group of high school students excludes a lonely classmate from their "cool" group. Power. Control. A check for a healthy sum is given to worthy cause with the understanding that the gift-giver gets to call the shots now. Power. Control.

What are the ways that you look to control the action? We may think that our little manipulations here and there are no big deal, but they betray a much deeper problem in our hearts—the problem of being self-serving, first and foremost.

Our Lord Jesus Christ gives us a totally different picture in what He expects from us. Jesus calls you not just to think about His action of humble service, but to be like Him; which is what it means to follow Him. Think of the power plays we engage in every day: as parent over child, spouse to spouse, single person with our friends. Think of the people you work with that you try to control in little ways. Think of the ways we try to manipulate so we can have it our way. Do we really want to serve—or be served?

Seeing how far we fall short of being like Jesus, we need to change direction; to return to the Lord in sincerity, saying, "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner."

It is time for renewal. It is time for a whole new orientation of your heart and mine. Tonight, Servant Jesus bends down from heaven to earth to wash you clean from sin. The One crowned with thorns comes to crown you as a prince or princess of His Kingdom. The One exposed on the cross comes to wrap you in His robe of righteousness. Jesus volunteered to become a slave in order to set you free! Voluntary slavery is the way that Jesus saved you. It is the way of Christ, and it is the way of the Christian.

What does that mean? It means that if you are a parent or a child, Jesus is calling you to serve your parents or to serve your children in love, gladly doing what is best for them with a willing spirit! It means that if you are married, you will submit to one another out of reverence for Christ, not keeping score but forgiving each other from the heart and moving on together. Members of St. Mark, it means, by the Holy Spirit's power, making your church a community of care, a oasis from selfishness, a place where people actually serve each other with the love of Jesus.

Servanthood means imitating a God who bends down into our lives; a God who kneels down to serve us; a God who loves us to death on a cross.

Servanthood means changing; being renewed; learning that whoever wants to be great must be a servant of Servant Jesus. The power for this renewal will come to you again and again through Jesus, as you search His Word in daily devotions; as you reflect on what baptism did to you; as He gives Himself to you at His Table. That is precisely why our worship is often described as "The Divine Service"—Servant Jesus comes to serve us with His priceless gifts. What we call a Christian life is, simply, how you respond to being served by God. That is going to look a lot like the voluntary slavery that set us free.

A well-to-do woman from Europe was on safari in Africa. One day she visited a leper colony. There she saw a nurse bending in the dust, tending to the sores of a leperous person. The heat was intense; the flies were buzzing as she filled his infected wounds. The well-to-do woman was so taken aback by this scene of suffering that words slipped out, "Why, I wouldn't do that for all the money in the world!" Without looking up from her work, the nurse quietly replied, "Neither would I."

Are you like that nurse? Our Lord says, "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." May this Lent be for you a time for renewal—a time where your sense of Christian servanthood is renewed. It begins and ends with Jesus. Tonight he hands you a towel and a bowl. He points you to where you should go. Most important, He goes with you...to serve.