

Practicing Freedom: Humility—The Posture of Freedom

Scripture: Romans 12:2

Rev Dr. Roberto Ché Espinoza

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The Apostle Paul's words call us out of what *is* and into what *could be*. Paul summons us to become a community that does not mirror the violence, domination, and injustice of the world, but dares to live a different way—*the way of Jesus*. This is the heartbeat of the Anabaptist tradition: a church not conformed to the world's logic of power and coercion, but a people *transformed* by love, by mercy, and by courageous peace.

This is the tradition that has shaped me as a young person and as an adult.

John Howard Yoder spoke of the church as a *visible alternative*, a living, breathing community where enemies are loved, swords are beaten into plowshares (Isaiah 2:4), and no one is left behind or left unheard. He called the church to *embody* the radical reconciliation of Christ, who “has broken down the dividing wall of hostility” (Ephesians 2:14).

And yet—we must tell the truth. Yoder's own life betrayed this vision. His failure to honor the bodies and dignity of women, and the silence that surrounded him, remind us that peace is not merely a theological idea. It is a way of being that must be practiced in every relationship, in every system, and in every heart. The feminist and womanist theologians who have cried out against this injustice are prophets among us. They teach us that a church of peace that does not *honor women's bodies* is not a peace church. A church that preaches reconciliation but silences survivors is not reconciled. The transformation we long for must reach the ground we stand on, the bodies we live in, and the communities we share.

And still—there is a way forward. There is always a way forward with God.

“Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good. Love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor.” (Romans 12:9-10)

This is the call. To live a *genuine* love. To honor one another. To become a church where peace is not abstract, but real; where justice is not postponed, but practiced.

The Anabaptist dream—at its best—is not about purity, but about practice. It's about a people who refuse to conform to the violent systems of the world and instead offer a *living sacrifice*—a community that shows the world what love looks like in flesh and bone.

I share this tradition of theological thinking with you, because the church has a chance to be prophetic right now. This church has an opportunity to say yes to the ways of Jesus and no to the ways of the world.

The truth divides people. Look at our political system.

What are the virtues that we need to practice right now? What stories should shape our community?

What are the virtues that we so desperately need to embody and practice?

Do we care about the culture of the church? Do we care about the culture we are attempting to shape?

What is our moral anchor? And, what are the virtues we are called to embody right now?

For Lent, I am continuing this journey of imagining what kind of community we are being called to be right now. So, for the rest of Lent, we will be exploring an ethical church in the ways of Jesus. You might think that sounds funny: ethical church! But, we know that churches are compromised right now. The mainline liberal protestant churches are facing decline because they no longer have a practice.

So, who are we called to be right now? What are our virtues?

Today we begin a journey together—a journey of cultivating the virtues that form us into a people of liberation, radical love, and holy fugitivity. This is not about becoming “better people” in some shallow moral sense, but about becoming *freer people*—people who resist empire, refuse domination, and practice life together in a way that points toward the kin-dom of God.

And we start—perhaps surprisingly—with **humility**.

Humility is not the most popular word these days. We live in a world where power shows off, where success shouts, and where self-promotion is an art form. In our world, humility often looks like weakness. But what if humility is the very posture of freedom? What if humility is how we step out of the systems that chain us and step into a new way of being?

Part I: The World Teaches Us Hubris

Our world runs on hubris.

It tells us:

- You are what you *earn*.
- You are what you *own*.
- You are what you *control*.

This is the logic of empire.

- It was the logic of Pharaoh.
- It was the logic of Caesar.

And it is alive today in the logics of capitalism, colonialism, and white supremacy.

But here’s the thing: that kind of power **enslaves** everyone—both the oppressed and the oppressor. It cuts us off from each other. It makes us believe we have to stand on top of one another to be someone. This is why the empire needs people full of hubris, full of themselves—because then they can’t be full of anything else.

Part II: Christ’s Freedom Was in His Emptying

Paul tells us in Philippians:

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to exploit, but emptied himself.”

He emptied himself.

Not because he was weak.

Not because he was afraid.

But because he was **free**.

The word here for “emptied” in Greek is *kenosis*. It’s a pouring out. Jesus didn’t cling to power. He let it go, so that love could flow freely through him. This is humility—not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself *less*. Humility is **self-forgetfulness**, a reorientation. It’s not “I’m nothing.” It’s “I am part of everything.”

Part III: Humility as Liberation

Liberation theology teaches us that real freedom doesn’t come from dominating others but from *walking alongside the oppressed*.

Gustavo Gutiérrez said, “*You say you love the poor. What are their names?*”

Humility teaches us to know names.
To listen to stories.
To **decenter** ourselves.

In **Anabaptist communities**, humility is how we practice *mutual aid*.

No one hoards.

No one lords power over others.

The early Anabaptists shared what they had because they believed they were stewards, not owners. They practiced humility as a way of resisting empire.

In **fugitive traditions**, humility is survival.

Enslaved people in America found refuge in hush harbors, hidden places where they gathered to worship in secret.

Their humility wasn’t defeat—it was wisdom.

It was stepping off the stage of empire, into the shadows where true life could grow.

Christians in the catacombs, Anabaptists on the run, Black fugitives in swamps—all of them practiced humility as a **holy refusal** to play the empire’s game.

Part IV: The Posture of Humility Today

So what does this mean for *us*, here, now?

- **Humility means learning to listen.**

It means we don’t assume we have the answers.

We make space for those at the margins to speak, and we listen as if our lives depend on it—because they do.

- **Humility means sharing power.**

We flatten hierarchies in our community.

We lead together.

We take seriously that *everyone* has something to offer.

We trust the Spirit more than we trust our own plans.

We practice collective discernment.

- **Humility means giving up control.**

We give up the need to be “right” and embrace the need to be *faithful*.

Part V: Humility as the Doorway to Liberation

I want to leave you with this image:

Humility is not crawling on your belly to please God.
Humility is **standing up**—straight and tall—shoulder to shoulder with your siblings,
refusing to step on anyone to climb higher,
and offering your hands to build something new.

It's an **emptying** that makes room for community.
A **letting go** that makes space for joy.

A **stepping back** that makes way for the Spirit.
This is the **posture of freedom**.
And it is *ours* to practice.

Call to Practice This Week

This week, I invite you to practice one act of holy humility.

- **Listen to a story** you might otherwise overlook.
- **Give up control** in one area and trust someone else to lead.
- **Confess** where you've held onto pride, and step into vulnerability.

As you do, know this:

You are not losing power.
You are gaining freedom.
And in that freedom, Christ meets us all.

Amen.