Humility and Integrity

This week I saw a video of the end of a race. It was the end of a triathlon. First, I can't imagine how tired you must be at the end of a triathlon. You must be just exhausted having pushed yourself to the very limit after swimming, biking, and running. In this video, you see the 2 leaders come around the last turn, and you see some barricades that should have shown them where to go, but coming around the last turn, the leader runs into a barrier, and he shakes his head like he thought it was the end. Because he stumbled, the runner who was in second, passed him easily and came around to the finish, but then you see this second guy slow down, and finally he stops. And he stops with his feet inches from the finish line.

Until the man who had been in first, crosses in front of him, then the next guy crosses the line, just behind him.

When the second-place finisher, who waited for the winner was interviewed, and asked why he waited, he said, "Well, he was in front of me the whole time. It was right that he win."

Just because of a stumble, this second-place finisher, who could have taken first, felt it was right that his competitor take first place.

This man showed integrity when his fellow runner stumbled. He did what he thought was right, even though he could have taken advantage of another's misfortune.

He showed a humility in front of his competitors and in front of video cameras, demonstrating that he did not think himself better than his rival.

This triathlete demonstrated, I think, a bit of what it is to follow the example of Christ with humility and integrity.

What does it look like to live with humility and integrity?

Now was Christ humble? Sometimes I don't think of Jesus as humble as he demonstrated a confidence in who he was and what he was set on earth to do. Yet Christ was humble in that he knew what he must do and humbled himself before God. Christ did not seek riches and power. Christ sought connection through love, community, healing of wounds physical and spiritual.

Did Jesus live with integrity. Yes. At every turn throughout the gospels, Jesus sees those who are in need and does something about it. Integrity is often described as doing the right thing, even when no one is there to see. Jesus did the right thing, when people were there to see, and also with those that no one else seemed to see. Jesus lived with integrity when he

healed the sick, fed the hungry, encouraged faith, and pointed out the ones in need.

In our reading from Matthew Jesus integrity leads him to one of the most difficult things he does:

Jesus challenges Bad Religion. Not the band from the 80s.

This reading today comes as Jesus is on his way to what he knows will be his crucifixion and right after he has come into the temple in Jerusalem, sees the money-changers cheating people out of a fair exchange.

And he flips over tables.

He gets angry at a system that exploits people who are in need. He gets angry at a system that says, "If I can make a buck, shame on you for not finding a better deal." He gets angry at an economic system, and a religious order which has lost its integrity and its humility.

Jesus calls these ruthless capitalists, a den of thieves.

Now after this, in today's reading, Jesus is teaching near the temple and the religious authorities come to him asking by what authority he teaches.

And Jesus says, let me tell you a little story. You want to know who has authority and how you should use it?

Well once there was a man with 2 sons. He told one to go and milk the cows, and cut down the hay. And the son said, "Whatever Dad, I have better things to do." But later, this first son got up and decided to do what was right, and help his father with the chores. Then the father told his second son to go milk the cows and mow the lawn, and this second one said, "Of Course, dad, I'll help you."

But then he went upstairs and played video games for the rest of the afternoon. Jesus asks the religious authorities, the ones with power, "Which of these sons did the will of his parent?"

The first who did the work, even though he said he wouldn't.

Then Jesus says that the tax collectors and the prostitutes, who now do the will of God, will enter the kingdom of heaven ahead of religious authorities who willfully go against what God wants, even though they know better.

It is those with integrity, those who turn around and live life in God who are a part of God's kingdom.

The Apostle Paul encourages us to let God work within us, so that we might do the work of God. So that our lives work out being the hands and feet of God. Paul reminds us that living life in Christ, living life in love means being humble, regarding others as better than ourselves and not to live only for selfish ambition.

Living life in love is to live like a runner, who with integrity and humbleness admits that he does not deserve the win because of an honest mistake made when his opponent was really tired.

Living with humbleness is like acknowledging that others have a right to life, to food, to shelter, as much as we do.

Living with integrity looks like acknowledging that economic systems often benefit not just those that work hard, but especially those who are already ahead, and that our systems do not treat everyone with equity.

Living life with the example of Christ before us looks like living a life of service to others, looking to our God whose compassion and love are from everlasting, from forever, from of old, for our authority.

Living life with Christ as our example does not look like following politicians, or celebrities, or governments or platitudes blindly. It looks like holding up every decision, every system, every interaction, every encounter with someone in need up to the light of Christ, holding it up to THE example of humility and integrity, Jesus the Christ, and allowing the God of love and mercy to work through us daily.

May we open our hearts to receive the Spirit of humility and integrity, and live our lives with that Christ-like nature guiding us to connection and compassion. May it indeed be so, and Amen.