

Sermon Notes: August 28, 2022

Focus: Humility and Pride [Lectionary Readings](#)

This is going to be a sermon on humility and false humility.

We will look at the shortest Old Testament reading this year.

Proverbs *Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of the great; for it is better to be told, "Come up here," than to be put lower in the presence of a noble.* That is the whole reading!

Jesus makes a similar connection in the Gospel

Luke *But when you are invited, go, and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."*

One of the things that constantly surprises me about Jesus is his ability to engage every person on their own terms. He keeps his identity intact - this is a highly underrated superpower for loving others. With the poor and marginalized, he walks alongside them, but is not a "poor man." Jesus could dine with the rich, but was not an aspiring rich man.

His sense of self and purpose were not dependent on other people's actions. I like this quote from the Message, which is a paraphrase of the Bible:

John 2 *People noticed the signs he was displaying and, seeing they pointed straight to God, entrusted their lives to him. But Jesus did not entrust his life to them. He knew them inside and out, knew how untrustworthy they were. He did not need any help in seeing right through them.*

He loved everyone but was seduced by no one. On the other hand, we wobble between false humility and prideful entitlement, or at least I do.

Humility by 2 x 4

It might seem like BLINDING FLASHES OF THE OBVIOUS BY TODD BRYANT to point out that you should not get too big for your britches. Life will humble you fast. You know... pride before the fall. As a pale, stale, male, I am used to people giving me the benefit of the doubt which can make me feel deserving. Being knocked down has been very instructive for me. For others, getting knocked down is a daily experience. They need less, not more 2 x 4. Jesus-y humility is self-loving, other oriented and independent of social station or experience

Don't cast your eyes down The biblical texts seem to imply bowing to the powerful as a way of life. This falsifying humility justifies caste systems (explicit or implicit); justifies racial segregation; and justifies idealizing women as homemakers. Instead, Jesus is inviting us to be

loose, know when to fight battles, and change the system. The Gospels are full of stories where Jesus is counseling people to be shrewd, count cost as if preparing for battle, and wait to strike when the iron is hot.

You are not God's gift to jerks On the other side of bowing and scraping, wealth and privilege easily corrode a sense of obligation to those deemed lower than thou. [Rich people drive in like jerks in the Altantic](#) is an article about how people who drive high end cars are far less likely to yield to pedestrians crossing at appropriately designated intersections. Privilege gives us the opportunity to tune out and not care about people deemed below us, all while feeling humble during church.

Regardless of which side the coin lands on for you, fight when it is time to fight, love when it is time to love, and always tune into each other no matter what. Tune in when it is easy, tune in when it is hard. True connection and Christian community are supposed to happen across class and privilege lines.

Two stories of my humble failures.

After I graduated from college, I stumbled around until I got a job working at a chemical factory. Finally, I felt like I was getting a job that matched my education. Post college, I had moved furniture, waited tables, done graveyard shifts as a lab tech, worked at a telemarketing company (for one day) which made me feel like college was a big waste of time - until the Houston job. In my vaunted position as Chemist, I wanted to make sure the admin staff knew they worked for me because I *deserved* it.

To my retrospective embarrassment, I would walk past the fax machine, hand a document to admin staff, and walk back to my office. By the time they faxed my paper, they were only about five steps behind to give me back the sent document. (Email was a not quite ubiquitous at that time.) I know delegated tasks are part of business, but I took it to the extreme. I felt above extremely basic office skills. God just tapped me on the shoulder to get over myself and take 30 seconds to send my own at the fax. I know that is a silly detail, but it points to the larger transformation of getting over myself that that job helped me achieve.

Second story more successful

Later, I had the privilege of working in a literal molasses factory. I supervised two lab techs. My greatest joys were *not* being the boss. My service felt great. I found great joy being an assistant to my employees. I got to help younger recent college grads. I felt like a million bucks when they were running the experiment and asking me to assist them. I got to help them *move up higher* as the Gospel says.

Be humble,
love God,

serve others,
step down and find joy.

Todd