

TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
MINOCQUA, WI
SERMON FOR APRIL 18, 2021

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being united in spirit, and having one mind. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility consider one another better than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look carefully not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

⁵ Indeed, let this attitude be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. ⁶ Though he was by nature God, he did not consider equality with God as a prize to be displayed, ⁷ but he emptied himself by taking the nature of a servant. When he was born in human likeness, and his appearance was like that of any other man, ⁸ he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

(Philippians 2:1-11 EHV)

The CEO of a Fortune 500 company pulled into a service station to get gas. He went inside to pay, and when he came out he noticed his wife deep in a discussion with the service station attendant. It turned out that she knew him. In fact back in high school before she met her husband, she used to date this man.

The CEO got in the car, and the two drove in silence. He was feeling pretty good about himself when he finally spoke: "I bet I know what you were thinking. I bet you were thinking you're glad you married me, a Fortune 500 CEO, and not him, a service station attendant." "No, I was thinking if I'd married him, he'd be a Fortune 500 CEO and you'd be a service station attendant."

"In humility consider one another better than yourselves," (v. 3b) Paul writes here in Philippians 2. In Romans 12:3, ***"Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you."***

Ah, humility. Preached about more than it is actually practiced while its opposite, pride, is preached against and warned against, but practiced quite regularly, even universally. Doubt this? Next time you listen to an athlete or a musician or a celebrity or a politician, ask yourself, "Are they promoting humility?" Next time you watch a rap video or hear any current pop culture song, any style – rap, rock, country – see if you can find any humility. Politics, the workplace, school, the family, among friends – pride is on display, humility is often hard to see.

What does the Bible say about pride? A sampling from Proverbs: ***"I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech"*** (8:13b). ***"Pride only breeds quarrels"*** (13:10a). It starts young: children between the ages of 2 and 4 average 6.2 fights per hour. That's about 90 fights per day, 3000 fights per year. ***"Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall"*** (16:18). Then, there are passages like these: ***"When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom"*** (11:2a). ***"A man's pride brings him low, but a man of lowly spirit gains honor"*** (29:23). James 4:6 offers a great summary of Bible teaching: ***"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."***

God's Word is very clear. Humility is good, God-pleasing, a characteristic worth pursuing and cultivating. Pride is bad, toxic, sinful, damning. So let's just get rid of the pride. Cold turkey. As of right now, we are done with pride.

If only it were that easy. Pride is a constant companion, because it comes from a sinful nature that feeds and fuels pride. Pride may well have been the very first sin of Satan. This fallen angel lost his place in heaven and then set out to ruin God's creation by tempting Adam and Eve to sin. Satan didn't want to serve, didn't

want to answer to anyone, and there are hints of that pride in the lies and half-truths he directed toward Eve: ***“Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” “You will not surely die (if you eat fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden), for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing God and evil.”*** (Genesis 3:1b,4) Do whatever you want to do, Eve. No one can tell you what to do, not even God.

Pride is all about you. It’s all about me. It’s about what I want. It’s about what I need. It’s about what I think. It’s about what I feel. It’s about what I declare. It’s about what I deserve. It’s about my glory. “Do you know who I am? Do you know what I’ve done? Do you respect me? Do you honor me? Do you praise me? Do you like me? Do you want to be like me?” And, while we’re at it, we tend to compare ourselves to other people, people who are less than us – less intelligent, less successful, less affluent, less attractive.

It’s a nasty business, this pride thing. In the 1960s, psychologist Milton Rokeach attempted to treat three patients at a psychiatric hospital who suffered from delusions of grandeur. Each believed he had been called to save the world; each believed he was Jesus Christ. He later wrote about the experience in a book entitled, “The Three Christs of Ypsilanti.”

Rokeach found it difficult to help the patients accept the truth about themselves, so he decided to put the three into a little community, to see if rubbing against people who also claimed to be the messiah might dent their delusion. A kind of messianic, 12-step recovery group. This led to some interesting conversations. One would claim, "I'm the messiah, the Son of God. I was sent here to save the earth." "How do you know?" Rokeach would ask. "God told me." One of the other patients would counter, "I never told you any such thing."

It's a crazy idea, taking a group of deluded, would-be messiahs and putting them into a community to see if they could be cured. But it has been done before. Remember the Twelve arguing about which of them was the greatest, multiple times, even the night before Jesus’ death. They weren’t the only followers who suffer from a messiah complex, who wave around a big foam finger declaring, “I’m #1.” C.S. Lewis said, ***“As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you.”***

Shame on those disciples and their sinful pride. Shame on you and me and our sinful pride. If Jesus had acted like us, thick-skulled, dim-witted, elbow-throwing, ladder-climbing thugs he would have called us on the carpet, shamed us, belittled us, expected obedience, and demanded service. But he turned the tables on pride. He smashed pride with...humility. He destroyed arrogance with selfless service. He defeated sin and death with his own death. And he did it willingly, humbly, freely.

“Though he was by nature God, he did not consider equality with God as a prize to be displayed, but he emptied himself by taking the nature of a servant. When he was born in human likeness, and his appearance was like that of any other man, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.” (vv. 6-8)

Following Christ’s humiliation – all the way to hell and back – there was exaltation. The result of his serving us, the result of his paying the price for all our sins, including our sins of pride and false humility? Resurrection and exaltation. ***“Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*** (vv. 9-11)

By grace, we’re blessed to be a part of this, God’s kingdom. Christ Jesus washed away our sins, redeemed us from death and the devil, and gives us life to the full – here and now and forever in heaven. We’re part of the kingdom, but Jesus’ organizational chart is all messed up/backwards/upside down. Want to be great? Greatness is not measured in how many people serve you, but in how many people you are serving. It’s not measured by how many people are under you, but by how many people are over you. ***“Indeed, let this attitude be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”*** (v. 5)

Paul begins this portion of his letter with four "if's." But the truth is, these statements are anything but iffy. In fact, the Greek word translated "if" could also be translated "since," assuming that these conditions are all true. Then our text would read: "***[Since] there is...encouragement in Christ, [since you have]... comfort from his love, [since you have] ...fellowship with the Spirit, [since you have] any affection and compassion...***" (v. 1)

Since we have all these things, we can't help but be changed. Christ's humility and loving attitude and actions for us change our attitudes. We're humbled by what he's done and thankful and seek to serve him and others in response to his great humility and love for us.

And there is joy to be found in humble service. Paul writes, "***Make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being united in spirit, and having one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility consider one another better than yourselves. Let each of you look carefully not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.***"(vv. 2-4)

That Greek word translated "look" isn't just "take a look at that." It means to "keep searching, to be on the lookout." Just like the little kid walking along the beach scouring the shoreline for shells, we seek and search to find ways to serve others. And in doing so, we find joy. Joy in Jesus. Joy in humility. Joy in serving as he serves.

Augustine, church father who lived around 400 AD said, "***Do you wish to rise? Begin by descending. You plan a tower that will pierce the clouds? Lay first the foundation of humility.***" Indeed, Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less, and of others more.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Stephen Luchterhand".

Pastor Stephen Luchterhand
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