

Virtue of Humility

Text: Jeremiah 2:4-13

Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16 (Series C. 12th Sunday after Pentecost) Ps.81:1,10-16

Luke 14:1, 7-14

*Those who make themselves great will be humbled,
and those who humble themselves will be made great."*

Let us pray:

The basic elements of the readings for this week contain the Gospel of Christ in a nutshell: *Humility. Love. Hospitality.* These are at once the minimal and important requirements for an authentically faithful and faith-filled life.

Reading the Gospels is never as confusing, but sometimes you wonder if Jesus does get things back to front and upside down. Today's reading is an example of this. He says that those who are great will be and least in the Kingdom of God and those who are humble will be the greatest.

That's so back to front. It should be those who get ahead, the winners in this world, those who use their worldly wealth to make more wealth, the successful people; they are the ones whom you would expect Jesus to say will the great people in God's Kingdom.

Then he adds that when inviting people to a dinner party don't invite your friends, or relatives, neighbours as you would normally do, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. How ridiculous is that! Inviting every drunk, street kid, drug addict, cheat you can find this is madness.

Jesus is redefining what "**hospitality**" is. He doesn't say to send food to the down and outs, but that the host is to sit down at a meal table with them. This is so back to front. Who in their right mind would do something like this? So back to front.

And these aren't the only instances of Jesus back to front ideas. He said, "*Those who want to save their life will lose, but whoever loses his life for me and the gospel will save it*" (Matt 8:35).

And on several occasions, he commends the most unlikely people for their faith or good deeds, like the *Samaritan leper*, the *Syro-Phoenician (Lebanese) woman*, *tax collectors* and *prostitutes*. Why doesn't he say nice things about the people whom you'd expect him to speak favourably – God's people.

Jesus is back to front and upside down. He does this to highlight that the ways of the Kingdom of God are not the same as that of the rest of the world.

What is considered right and good in the world may not be the case in God's Kingdom. He gives us these back to front ideas to help us re-examine what it is that we have accepted as right, whereas in actual fact they are not God's ways.

It is so easy for a Christian to be so taken up with a certain attitude or way of life that is so opposite what God wants. The argument always goes, "*Everyone else is doing it.*" But just because everyone else is doing it, doesn't mean it is right and God-pleasing.

- Just because every one else at school is cheating, doesn't mean that this is right thing to do.
- Just because your friends ridicule first nations, gay people or Blacks or any minority group, or migrants that doesn't mean that this is what God wants.

You see, it's so easy for us as God's people to unintentionally say things that are right when they are wrong. This is what Jesus is saying today in our text.

God's ways can be so against what is the accepted standard in the rest of the world. Why do we find following God's ways so hard and following the crowd so easy? There are several reasons.

Firstly, there is the problem of *standing out*. If you adopt an attitude that is different to everyone else you will be noticed. If you express what are God's ways in a discussion, you are afraid that you might be called "*a religious fanatic*". And so to avoid that, it's better to go along with everyone else.

Secondly, the ways of the world can be much more appealing and easier than those of the Kingdom of God. It's easier to bolt out of a relationship than to go through all the hassles of trying to resolves the problems in a relationship.

Thirdly, the shift from God's ways and the ways of the world can be so elusive. Satan makes us think that we are following the ways of God's Kingdom whereas in fact we are following Satan's ways.

I have known people who are regular Sunday worshippers believe that there is nothing wrong with consulting their horoscope or mediums before making important decision, and not the Bible.

Somehow, along the way they came to believe there was nothing wrong with it. Their acceptance of this had been so subtle that they hadn't noticed the conflict with their Christian faith. The shift happened so slowly and so cleverly that they couldn't believe that they had been so easily led away from Jesus.

Fourthly, the culture we live in is very good at producing popular trends. We call it the "*in thing*". It's the "*in thing*" to wear certain style of clothes. It's the "*in thing*" for men and women to spend loads of money seeking the perfect looking body.

It's so easy to follow what is "*the in thing*" without even checking whether this is what God wants us to do or not. We follow the crowd along without realizing that what we are doing may not be what God wants.

Why are we here? What is God's plan for us in this world? It's a good idea to re-examine – ourselves for our role in this society. Is our home where the destitute might find a refuge?

Is our home a place where Jesus is spoken about and taught frequently? Or does our home place too much emphasis on material happiness rather than happiness that comes from knowing Jesus?

To follow God's ways may seem like the more difficult path, in fact the path that seems so back to front compared to the ways of the world. Jesus never promised that following God's ways would be the easiest path.

This is the way God's people stand out from the rest of the world. We can witness to the world that there is a better way. We can give evidence to the world that being a member of God's kingdom is something very special; that it makes a difference in the way we live our lives.

The question that remains to be answered is – "how do I find out what is God's ways for my life and my family? What does it mean to live as members of God's Kingdom? The answer is simple – God's Word, the Bible is the starting point. This is God's message to all of us and reveals to us God's Son.

God wants us to read it and study and take in what it means to be members of the Kingdom of God. He wants us to learn how much he loves us.

And the more we read it, the more we become aware that we are very poor at being members of God's kingdom. Our ego wants to take the easy path, to do the "*in thing*", to follow the crowd and not stand out. Everyday our best intentions are sidetracked and we fall into sin, we deny that we are members of God's Kingdom.

The Bible reminds us that we are "*forgiven*". He makes us clean with his precious blood. And then he invites us to live as his people in his Kingdom. But life in the reign of God is no cheese cake – it is hard work. Jesus' disciples were the first to understand this.

God grant us the wisdom and the ability of discerning what are God's ways and what are not, so that we may faithfully follow Jesus in spirit and truth. As people of the Kingdom, what image do we project outside of these four walls? It is an honest question 'what image do we project outside of these four walls?'

- Do we live as an inviting people?
- Do we speak inviting words?
- Do we have inviting attitudes?
- Do we lead lives that invite people to Christ?

Especially those people who are *poor, crippled, lame, and blind, down and out?* Those people who have nothing to offer to us in return? *Why are we here?* The point, I would like to make, is that in God's eyes, we're all equally needy.

Oh 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
To know me is to love me, I must be a hell of a man
Oh Lord It's hard to be humble, But I'm doing the best that I can.* (Mac Davis, 1980)

Charlemagne, Mother Teresa, Pope Francis, you and me. None of us will ever be "*good enough*" to think that the presence of God belongs to us. As we come to the Lord's Table this morning, we all come equal before God, sinners in need of *salvation*, beggars in need of *bread*, strangers who were at one time, like ourselves, welcomed to this holy place.

There are empty places among us today - places that will be only filled if you and I allow God to issue an invitation through us to those, who like us, are in need. I ask you today not to think less of yourselves - we are, after all, part of the family of God and God has laid this table before us - Christ has given his life for us. Rather think of ourselves less, so that God will be all in us.

Apostle Paul writes: *Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it...Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have...Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Through him, then, let us offer a sacrifice of praise to God...* (Hebrews 13:2, 5, 8, 15)

Jesus modeled humility for us in many ways, especially with the foot washing at the Last Supper. We, as followers of Christ, are called to *Humility*, *Love*, and *Hospitality* in an attitude of a *lower* place in this life with the blessings and grace already given us. If nothing else, we will try to remember that Jesus doesn't want us to be proud of our humility!

Remember the rest of the family and pray that God will use you and that God will use me and that God will use each and every one of us here today morning to invite others to come in and sit down and know that they are part of the family, to come in and sit down - and to receive the life that is to be found in the *bread* and the *wine*, the life that Jesus came to give to all who would receive it. **Amen.**

Let us pray: O Lord, our God, inspire us to choose a lower place at Your holy table than the place we offer to others, that in humility we may entertain angels unaware. May Your name always be the fruit of our lips and each facet of our lives reflect a continual sacrifice of praise to You. We ask through Christ our Present and Eternal Savior; and the Holy Spirit, the Sacred Breath of Heaven, who together with You are One God, from before the beginning to beyond the end. **Amen.**

Prayer concerns: *Shirley Walker, Hanne Bourgeoise, Sven Berg, Astrid Hylland, Ellen Eriksen, Ellen Dahal-Lanteigne, Wilhelmina Tiemersma, Soo Young, Shirley Walker, Glenn Cleaver. May they find solace in the love and grace of God. The dire tension between Russia and Ukraine, Protectors at various places in our world, Covid -19 patients, essential and Frontline workers, finally Families of departed souls in recent weeks and months.*

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- **Lord, Enthroned in Heaven Splendor # 475**
- **Lord God, We Praise You # 558**
- **When Peace like a River # 785**

Birthdays

Mehrnoosh Shakiba

Wedding Anniversary

Tony and Jette Blair

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