

The Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost
September 1, 2013
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

Proverbs 25:6-7

“Do not exalt yourself in the king’s presence, and do not claim a place among great men; it is better for him to say to you, ‘Come up here,’ than for him to humiliate you before a nobleman.” (NIV)

“My sermon today is on humility, and in my opinion, it is by far one of the finest sermons ever written.” This comic made me laugh but at the same time it reminded me of a sad truth when it comes to humility. I find it difficult to be genuinely humble. It also reminded me of a story one of my professors at our seminary, now retired, liked to tell. He told us about this man whom everyone recognized as the most humble man in the village. He displayed such humility that the people wanted to do something to recognize just how humble this guy really was and so they presented him with a gold medallion. And from that day on this man wore his gold medallion around his neck wherever he went. And while my professor usually laughed at his joke more than we did, again it taught a truth about how a truly humble person is very hard to find.

Haven’t you also found these observations to be spot on! Humility is an extremely challenging thing for sinners like us to attain. A truly humble person is tough to find. Yet, humility is such an important attitude if we are going to be the people God wants us to be and humbleness is vital if we are going to live the lives God wants us to live. So it isn’t surprising the Lord speaks to us in numerous places throughout His Word about humility. God talks to us and teaches us about being humble. As the Lord speaks to us through this short, simple, and straightforward proverb of Solomon I want us to consider this question: **What is true humility?**

It appears obvious that these are the words Jesus had in mind when he tells his parable in our Gospel lesson after noticing how the guests picked the places of honor at the table. Here too we have a banquet setting; this one thrown by the king. Solomon writes: ***“Do not exalt yourself in the king’s presence, and do not claim a place among great men; it is better for him to say to you, ‘Come up here,’ than for him to humiliate you before a nobleman.”*** The advice is very simple, isn’t it? Don’t exalt yourself in the king’s presence or claim a high place among the leaders. You might not be as important as you think you are and you might even be humiliated if the king says *“what do you think you are doing up here”* and asks you to take another seat. Solomon advises that it would be much better to take a seat where the king might say to you: *“what are you doing way down there?”* ***“Come up here.”***

But what does this mean for us? How do these words apply in our lives? I don’t know any of us who have been invited to a banquet with a king or even for a meal with the president for that matter. Yet, isn’t it also just like us to want to exalt ourselves? Is there not a part of us always striving to be honored and wanting to claim a place among the great? Permit me to give some examples. The cake is cut and you notice one piece is bigger than the rest or you are the first one in the living room and everyone’s favorite chair is open. Children, which slice of cake or chair do you take? When we put our gifts and abilities to work, when do something nice or help someone in need, do we do it

quietly and without fanfare, or do we want to make sure everyone else knows what we have done? Have we ever put others down to make ourselves look better? Do we want other people to notice us and the things we do?

Isn't it obvious that our lives display the very opposite of true humility? All too often pride has come before our fall. Jesus tells us: ***"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."*** This is even more important when we stand before the King of kings and Lord of lords. For what will happen to us if we try to exalt ourselves before God? What will come about if we think we are good enough to claim a place at the Lord's heavenly banquet? If we believe we are good enough to stand before God on our own, if we attempt to get to heaven by the good things we think we have done, we will be more than humiliated! We will be sent down into the eternal fires of hell.

Where can we find a truly, genuine, humble person? What is true humility? We have seen it my friends, haven't we? We have seen it in a manger where the Lord of heaven and earth was wrapped in swaddling clothes. We have witnessed true humility as God's own Son became the servant of all. We have seen true humility in Jesus' perfect life of love. We have watched what true humility looks like as the Master washes the dirt off the feet of His disciples. We have observed true humbleness unlike anything else as a suffering servant, a Savior, takes our sin and wretchedness and guilt upon Himself and for us becomes obedient to death – even death on a cross! Yes Jesus takes all sin, none of which was His own, and all of ours, and in love He takes the lowest place of all. Jesus did this so that He can say to sinners like us: ***"Come up here."*** Jesus died and rose again to provide for us eternal seats of honor among the great at His heavenly banquet.

What is true humility? We have seen it, haven't we? We also see it in those whose lives have been changed by Jesus' love. In people like Moses who said: ***"Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt?"*** (Ex. 3) Or in Jacob who took inventory of all he had from God and said: ***"I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant."*** (Gen. 32) We have seen true humility in an unnamed tax collector who wouldn't even look up to heaven as he spoke: ***"God have mercy on me, a sinner!"*** We have seen real humbleness in servants like Paul who confessed: ***"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me."*** (Gal. 2)

And I have seen this humility in many other Christian men, women, and children who look out not just for their own interests but for the interests of others. I have seen it in acts of love that are done even when no one else was watching. I've observed people who in view of God's mercy have given of themselves and their time and talents as their spiritual act of worship. I have seen people do good, even great things only because Jesus loves them and they love Him. I've watched people who whether they ate or drank or whatever they were doing wanted it to be done to the glory of God. In Christ, and in Christ's people, I have seen true humility.

There is a story about the boxer Muhammad Ali in his prime. He was on an airplane that was about to take off. All seat belt signs were on and the stewardess noticed Ali did not have his seat belt on and went over to remind him to fasten it. Ali came back brashly, ***"Superman don't need no seat belt."*** The stewardess quickly replied: ***"Superman don't need no airplane, either."*** I guess Muhammad Ali then quietly put on his seat belt. We may not be as brash as the boxer who proclaimed to be the greatest.

But I pray these words today remind each of us we have a sinful nature which wants to make this claim, a sinful nature which likes to tell each of us that we are super. I pray it never convinces us that “we don’t need no Savior.” For we need Jesus most of all. May our Savior keep using His Word and love to teach us the meaning of true humility.
Amen.