



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for April 3, 2022
“Lay Down Your Pride”
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Mark 10:35-45

We’re Number 1

The chants always happen around this time of year. *“We’re number 1,”* is a staple around NCAA Tournament time. Pride has a way of oozing out when the chant goes up. The pride we have in our favorite team is not all bad.

Pride, though, has a way of tripping us up. Proverbs 16:8 says that *“pride goes before the fall.”* History is full of people whose pride led to their downfall.

Pride certainly puts our focus on the wrong things. An inflated view of self always correlates to a deflated view of God. Pride not only has a way of disrupting relationship with God, but relationships with other people.

Pride is the first of the seven deadly sins. I am talking about the sort of arrogant, hypocritical, self-centered disposition that works to stunt our relationship with God and cuts us off from other people.

C. S. Lewis once wrote, *“A proud person is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as that person is looking down, they can’t see something what’s above them.”*

When it comes to pride, far too many have an *“I”* problem, not an *“eye”* problem, but a capital *“I”* problem.

Jesus has something to say about that in a conversation he has with two of his disciples when **their** pride gets in the way. Let’s read about that as we turn to Mark 10:35-45

Mark 10:35-45

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.”

“What do you want me to do for you?” he asked.

They replied, “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.”

“You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said. “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?”

“We can,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."

When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

An Age of Self-Interest

As we all know, this is an age where self-interest trumps everything else. You see it in politics and business: sports and entertainment. Self-interest is very much at play with what's going on in the Ukraine. Putin's own pride is front and center. Self-interest was at least a part of the Will Smith/Chris Rock incident this past week.

People everywhere are seeking their own interests, even at the expense of others. Regrettably, far too many relationships are built upon self-interest and because of that those relationships suffer.

Seeking Acclaim

I like the story told about the fifth grader who came home from school so excited. She had been voted "*prettiest girl in the class.*" The next day she was even more excited when she came home and told her mom that she had been voted "*most likely to succeed.*" The next day she came home and shared that she had been voted "*the most popular.*"

The following day she came home extremely upset. Her mother asked, "*What happened, did you lose this time?*"

"Oh no, I won, alright. Today, I was voted, 'most stuck up.'"

It's just in us to seek acclaim. Let's see how that plays out for a couple of Christ's disciples.

A Kingdom of Humility and Service

Our scripture for today shares the story about two in Christ's inner circle who let their pride and self-interest get the best of them. James and John were known as the "*Sons of Thunder.*" They felt like they were entitled to whatever they wanted.

They were fishermen by trade, but theirs, unlike Peter and Andrew's, was a big operation. They were "*the Sons of Zebedee,*" after all. Momma Zebedee didn't help matters much. She was all about promoting her sons.

In following Christ, James and John knew they had hitched their wagon to something big and wanted to make sure they were at the center of things. So, it shouldn't surprise us that they asked Jesus to offer them a place of honor once his Kingdom was established.

"Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory." (Mark 10:37)

Regrettably, James and John had misunderstood the type of Kingdom Jesus had come to establish. His was not a kingdom characterized by pride and prestige, but humility and service.

Laying Down One's Prideful Ways

Laying down one's prideful ways was a consistent theme for Jesus. In Matthew 23:6, Jesus chided the Scribes and Pharisees because they *"loved places of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogue."* (Matthew 23:6) They were all about being noticed.

In Luke 14:7ff., Jesus chides those who seek those places of honor. *"When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet,"* he says, *"do not sit down at the place of honor,"* because someone more distinguished might show up and that person will offer your seat.

"Instead," says Jesus, *"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."*

Christ speaks great truth here. *"For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."* (Luke 14:11)

Humility is the way of Christ's Kingdom, not pride.

What Do You Want Me to Do for You?

James and John were unashamed in asking Jesus to do for them whatever they requested. It's interesting that he responded by asking, *"What do you want me to do for you?"*

That's an important question he asks us as well. *"What do you want me to do for you?"* gives us pause to sift through our own pride and selfishness to get to the sort of requests we need to be making. In our prayers we'd do well to fashion our requests with God's will in mind.

A Wonderful Teaching Moment

Jesus used James' and John's request as a wonderful teaching moment, not only for James and John, but for the rest of the disciples. It is also very instructive for us.

Jesus knew that James and John didn't have a clue what they were asking for. He knew that drinking from the cup he was about to drink or being baptized into what he was about to go through was the furthest thing from their minds.

He also knew that the prideful, jealous indignation of the rest of the disciples wasn't where they needed to be either. So, Jesus taught them and teaches us that *"whoever wants to become great must be a servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all."*

Jesus teaches that our prideful, self-seeking ways ultimately get us nowhere. Christ's way is simply different, and he leads the way. Is anybody surprised?

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45)

Blind Bartimaeus

I think it is interesting that Mark has Jesus and his disciples in the very next passage encountering the blind man Bartimaeus on their way out of Jericho on their way to Jerusalem for the very last time.

Bartimaeus calls out, *“Lord, have mercy on me.”*

To which Jesus responds, *“What do you want me to do for you?”* There’s that exact same question.

As we know, Bartimaeus was healed that day, and as the scripture reports went on to follow Jesus. There wasn’t much pride involved in Bartimaeus’ request. He didn’t ask for position or riches, but for the priceless gift of sight. Bartimaeus asked faithfully and with a humble heart. His pride had long since been laid aside.

That was not so much the case with James and John, or the rest of the disciples for that matter.

Eventually they too would lay down their pride. They would soon experience Christ’s death and resurrection and whatever pride they had would be laid aside for the sake of knowing Christ, the one who lived, died, and rose again.

We are attempting to do the very same things this very special season of the year as we too seek to experience Christ’s death and resurrection.

What about Your Prideful Ways?

Try as we might, pride is one of the toughest things to overcome.

Ben Franklin puts it this way, *“There is perhaps no one of our natural passions so hard to subdue as pride. Beat it down, stifle it, mortify it as much as one pleases, it is still alive. Even if I could conceive that I had completely overcome it, I should probably be proud of my humility.”*

What is it about us that pride always seems to get in the way? What is it about pride that seems to be such a driving force in our lives?

How about you? How about your prideful ways?

With Christ’s help, lay them down and experience him to the full.