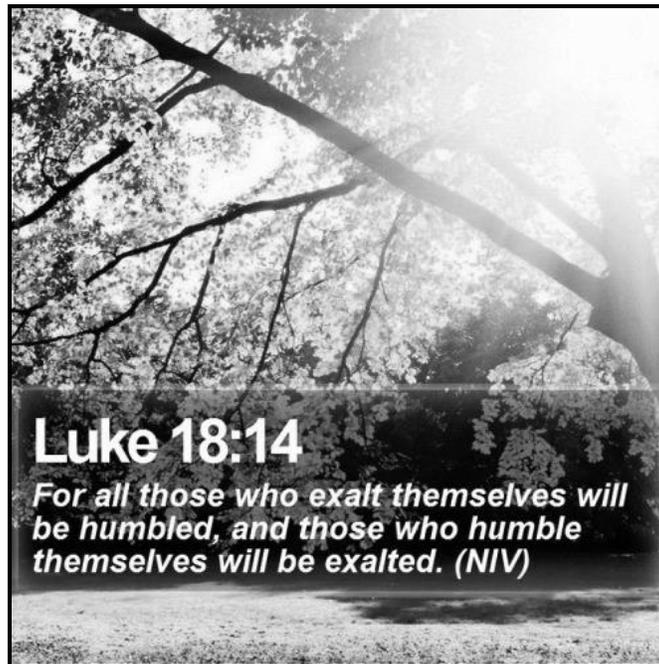


HUMILITY IS HUGE!



Scripture:

Psalm 84:1-7

¹How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts! ²My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.

³Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at your altars, O LORD of hosts, my King and my God. ⁴Happy are those who live in your house, ever singing your praise. *Selah*

⁵Happy are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion. ⁶As they go through the valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools. ⁷They go from strength to strength; the God of gods will be seen in Zion.

Luke 18:9-14

⁹He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: ¹⁰“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

¹¹The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’ ¹³But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ ¹⁴I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



HUMILITY IS HUGE!

Some of you might remember a country singer named Mac Davis. He had a song called: *O Lord It's Hard to be Humble*. The chorus goes:

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.

This could be the theme song of the Pharisee in our passage today. First, he lists his own virtues: he fasts, he tithes (gives generously in good stewardship to the church) which is good! He was clearly a righteously religious man.

And then the Pharisee turns and looks at the tax collector who was praying at a distance, and he thanks God that he is not like him. It's hard to be humble when you're perfect in every way.

THE TAX COLLECTOR

How can we blame the Pharisee for comparing himself to the low life of a tax collector? Don't we all compare ourselves to others to make us feel better about our faults or imperfections?

The tax collector here was an easy target. In those days, tax collectors were despised. Many of us today do not like our Internal Revenue Service tax collectors either, but at least they don't haul off your child if you don't pay your taxes! The Roman Tax Collectors were capable of doing such things. They were allowed to charge more than people really owed and keep the profit for themselves, so many of them did. Some tax collectors in those days would go up to people they met on the road and charge them taxes on the goods they were carrying, too.

Roman tax collectors were hated in general. But the most hated tax collectors were the Jewish tax collectors who cheated their own people and charged them beyond what was fair. That is the

type Jesus is holding up in this parable. The example he is lifting up for us to imitate is the one who has potentially done despicable things and yet, he is throwing himself at the feet of God, admitting his sinfulness, and asking for mercy. Jesus paints a scene with the tax collector beating his chest, staring at the ground, too ashamed to hold his head up, while the Pharisee pridefully watches.

HUMBLING OF THOSE WHO EXALT THEMSELVES

This parable was a lesson for those who think of themselves as so righteous and holy they believe they have a right to look upon others with contempt. The Pharisees that Jesus was speaking to must have been terribly shocked by this accusation of them. And especially when Jesus ended this lesson with a threat: "Those who exalt themselves will be humbled; and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Isn't this humbling of those who exalt themselves just a natural consequence in this world that happens in many lives? When we get in our heads that we are better than others, that is when the humiliation type of humbling seems to happen.

TY WARNER

Ty Warner is a good example. He was the creator of Beanie Babies. When one of his employees was cautioning him about allowing the company to get too big, he bragged, "I could put the Ty heart on manure and they'd buy it!" He was wrong. And the company not only catastrophically failed, he later narrowly missed going to jail for tax evasion.

With success and power, more often than not, we tend to overestimate our own power. Then we lose perspective. And there begins our downfall. There are exemptions though.

BILL WALSH

Bill Walsh was an example of the humble way to respond to power and success. In 1979, football coach Bill Walsh took the 49ers from being the worst team in football to a Super Bowl victory, in just three years. All together he won three Super Bowls. When he was interviewed by reporters, he remained very humble and he

refused to indulge in the praise and glory poured upon him. Instead, he focused on creating a culture of excellence and he instilled what he called his “standard of performance,” the behaviors and standards necessary to win.

Bill Walsh’s Standard of Performance

- **Exhibit a ferocious and intelligently applied work ethic directed at continual improvement.**
- **Demonstrate respect for each person in the organization.**
- **Be deeply committed to learning and teaching.**
- **Be fair.**
- **Demonstrate character.**
- **Use positive language and have a positive attitude.**
- **Take pride in my effort as an entity separate from the result of that effort.**
- **Be willing to go the extra distance for the organization.**
- **Deal appropriately with victory and defeat, adulation and humiliation.**
- **Promote internal communication that is both open and substantive (especially under stress).**
- **Seek poise in myself and those I lead.**
- **Put the team’s welfare and priorities ahead of my own.**
- **Maintain an ongoing level of concentration and focus that is abnormally high.**
- **Make sacrifice and commitment the organization’s trademark.**

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SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HUBRIS

People who are wealthy and powerful can also be some of the loneliest people in the world because they can lose trust, and their arrogance causes separation from other humans. Howard Hughes for example was one of the most financially successful men in the world and also a very tortured soul who died of malnutrition and codeine addiction at the age of seventy, a very lonely man. He had alienated all his family and friends.

Jesus was warning his followers then and us today that self-righteousness and hubris will likely cause one to be humbled involuntarily like

Hughes. The word “hubris” is Greek for being haughty or prideful.

JESUS ENCOURAGED HUMILITY

The opposite of hubris is “humus” in Latin which is the root word for humility. Like the soil is humus. People were originally made from the soil, the humus, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. The root literally identifies something that is “low-lying, not rising far from the ground” and one who is “lowly in spirit, unpretentious.” To humble something is to make it low. When we humble ourselves it helps us be grounded.

Jesus encouraged humility and being grounded because it is beneficial to our lives. Humility means so much more than not being arrogant. It takes a humble person to listen and learn from others. When you are humble you connect to community and lean on others and God for support in a helpful and healthy way. Pride gets in the way of receiving support and having faith.

We are made to be humble and helpful, not haughty or hateful. When we put ourselves above those born with different sexual orientation, the drug addicted, the less fortunate, or think we are better than people of another color or culture, we miss out on the blessings of those friendships and the learning opportunities that come from being with people not exactly like us. God knows we need each other and pride is one of the deadliest sins because it causes separation and division from one another.

**Theologian John Stott said,
“Pride is your greatest enemy,
humility your greatest friend.”
That’s like saying,
“Humility is HUGE!”**

THE SIN OF PRIDE

C. S. Lewis said, “Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind...” It is the devil’s most destructive tool. Pride is not just a problem for the rich and famous. C. S. Lewis reminds us: “It is easy to see pride in others; it is very difficult to see it in ourselves.

He said, "There is no fault which we are more unconscious of in ourselves. The more we have pride in ourselves, the more we dislike it in others."

That is why this parable from Jesus is so important. He features a Pharisee who is totally unconscious of the sin of pride he is committing by judging himself as better than the tax collector. The Pharisee is demonstrating the sin of arrogance, considering himself righteous while knocking others down or devaluing them to make himself bigger.

Reflecting on child psychology: This behavior may be due to an early lack of consistent nurturing, messages of disapproval, and conditional love. The child becomes entrenched in fear of negative perceptions.

The arrogant person grows up afraid to show any real weaknesses, failings or imperfections. As a result their life lacks authenticity and honesty.

JESUS MODELED HUMILITY

Jesus preached the opposite of arrogance and role modeled humility. When he launched His ministry, he opened his Sermon on the Mount with: "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth." Simple ways of living humbly and peacefully lead to grateful joy and less stress. The blessings of heaven and earth are easily found by the meek.

Later when his disciples were fighting over who would get to sit on his right and left in heaven, according to Matthew 20:26-28, Jesus said, "*It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*" Then he washed their dirty feet and told them to go and do likewise for others.

GANDHI

Soon, I'll be talking about my trip to India after the service. Did you know all of the dollar bills (rupees) in India have Mahatma Gandhi's image on them? He is so revered in India since he inspired independence from British rule.

One of the most memorable parts of the trip was the visit to the Gandhi museum and the place of his death in New Delhi. Gandhi demonstrated humbleness by living in poverty voluntarily. He made his own clothes and ate simple vegetables. This frail wise man who gave up a comfortable life made a huge difference in a peaceful way, and inspired the world. About "humility" Mahatma Gandhi said, "It is unwise to be too sure of one's own wisdom. It is healthy to be reminded that the strongest might weaken and the wisest might err."

He is also remembered saying, "The spirit of non-violence necessarily leads to humility. Non-violence means reliance on God, the rock of ages. If we would seek his aid, we must approach Him with a humble and contrite heart."

So may we not be arrogant and remember our reliance on God, our rock of ages. May we strive to never exalt ourselves but only boast by bringing our thanks and praise, glory and honor to God. And may we remain hugely humble, not only to be healthy and happy, but also to help our whole community learn from and support one another.

According to Proverbs 22:4, "The reward of humility along *with* the reverent worship of the Lord is abundant life." May it be so for us all. Amen

Benediction: Be in this world a sign of Christ's love in action.

Share compassion and peace with everyone you meet.

When called to lead, do so with humility and confidence in God, who loves you unconditionally and always.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen



**Rev. Dr. Cindy Alloway
Presbyterian Church of the Roses
2500 Patio Court
Santa Rosa, CA 95405**