

Dorothy Sayers (Letters to a Diminished Church) and Dr. Neal Plantinga (Not the Way It's Supposed to Be) have helped me a lot with this sermon.

This morning we are talking about pride. There is such a thing as 'good pride'. If you would say that you are proud to be Canadian, or proud of your parents or your children, and what you are talking about is mixed with thankfulness and blessedness, that's healthy pride.

Sinful pride is a different thing altogether. It boils down to "trying to be as God". (Dorothy Sayers)

The sin of pride is living by our own wits, ideas, impulses and imaginations. The God of the universe may have made us, but we don't need him or even need to show him any real respect. That's pride.

"Pride makes God seem irrelevant. God wants to fill us with his Holy Spirit.

When we are proud we are full of ourselves. There is no room for God". (Neal Plantinga)

Some sins attack us in the area of our weaknesses. Pride attacks us in the areas of our strengths. We delude ourselves into taking credit for things that are gifts to us. As if we had chosen our parents well, or as if we had chosen God's blessings.

Pride is the deadliest of the seven deadly sins and the root of all the rest because again, when we are proud we make our own rules for the game of life.

'If we could put pride under a microscope we would find that it is a blend of self-absorption and an overestimate of our abilities or self-worth. To put it another way, in our pride we think of ourselves often and we think a lot of ourselves.

Sinful pride might be titanic or pathetic or it could wobble in between. Sinful pride often rests on a bed of fear that we really don't add up to much.

That is why if we name drop or mention the successes of our children when we have not been asked about them.

Winston Churchill and his valet had words. Afterward Churchill rumbled, "you were rude."

His valet forgot his place and said, "you were rude too".

"Yes, said Churchill, but I am a great man".

It is worth noting that, as a child Churchill had been brutally ignored by his self-absorbed parents (who, despite his pleading, wouldn't visit him at boarding school or stay at home for his Christmas visits). Carrying childhood self-doubt like a backpack, the adult Churchill was determined to throw it off—and did a pretty good job of it.' (Plantinga p.85)

It is easy to put someone, even someone as large as Churchill under a kind of microscope and dissect his obvious pride. He was overcompensating for the wounds of childhood. Next.

It is not so easy to put ourselves under the glass and dissect our own pride.

So let us simply say that if we feel no need for God's mercy and no need of help from others there is a pretty good chance we are living prideful lives.

If we notice that we have a habit of looking down on others, or if other peoples' pride drives us crazy, there is a very good chance that pride has a hold of us.

The problem with pride as a hiding place is that this hiding place becomes our prison. If we are too proud to reach out to God for his love and mercy and help and too proud to reach out to others for help we find ourselves more and more isolated and alone.

Jesus wants to call us out of the prison of pride and into life.

That's why he told this story.

Let's listen now. If it helps you, substitute the name or title of the person you can think of whose faith you most respect for "Pharisee," and "internet spam distributor" for tax collector)

Read Luke 18:9-17

It's a shocking story, meant to shock. The Pharisee was the most respected, the most 'living out your faith' person anyone could ask to meet. This Pharisee was a giver. He tithed way over and above what was expected. The tax collector was a taker. Tax collectors would take what the market would bear, pay Rome what was due and then pocket and live well off the rest.

The tax collector went home justified, forgiven, right with God, the Pharisee just went home.

“Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled. Everyone who humbles himself will be exalted”. Jesus ends this with a threat and a promise. “Everyone who exalts himself, no exceptions! Will be humbled. It’s like Jesus is walking around among us and when our noses are in the air and we become too proud to pray, or we get all puffed up about what’s going right in our lives and look down on others, he sticks out a dusty sandaled foot and trips us up.

I don’t know how it is for you, but I think we fight a battle against pride as long as we have breath.

“Everyone who humbles himself will be exalted”. If we get honest about our need for God and for his forgiveness and his mercy and if we follow Jesus into a life of footwashing and serving, we will be exalted.

I have an example.

The alumni magazine for a Christian college Audrey attended came the other day. She went to three, it could have been any one. In the back they had stories about alumni they want to honour by telling their stories.

There’s a story about a Japanese man who served as an interpreter between US President Ronald Reagan and the Japanese Prime Minister. And about a young woman from Nepal who has started four Christian micro-enterprises in Kathmandu.

But the one that caught my eye is the story of Rich Strikwerda from Barrie, Ontario. He’s a retired school teacher who picks up trash from a quarter mile long strip of land at the main off ramp into the city. 135,520 separate pieces in

2009. (He keeps a spreadsheet) The city of Barrie has exalted him and heaped awards on him. He says, "We're stewards of God's creation."

And they were bringing babies to Jesus so that he might touch them. The disciples are annoyed. They tell the moms and dads to leave Jesus alone.

Jesus looks up, his face brightens, "babies!" He calls to the parents and their children.

After thinking about Pharisees and dealing with disciples the babies and little kids are a relief.

We enter the kingdom of God like little children and babies or not at all.

So what exactly is it about young Jake and other little ones that we need to see?

The thing about babies and children and how they lead us into the kingdom is that they don't know pride.

They are completely dependant on their mom and dad and on God and they have no problem with being open about that.

Jake just had a tour of the church, travelled through the whole congregation. He wasn't high-fiving anyone, just being a baby.

The only way to enter the kingdom of God is to admit our total need for God, and trust that he makes a fuss over us and in Christ, calls us his beloved children.

Jake has been baptized into a community of people that says, 'we only have life through Jesus'. 'We depend on God', 'we want to trust and follow him'.

As Christian parents we lead our babies and children by daring to be as children before God ourselves.

We will always struggle with pride.

We repent from sinful pride by daring to see and follow Jesus. Riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, the humble king. Washing feet. Away in prayer. Dying on the cross for our sins.

Pride is a sin of contempt for God and contempt for others. We repent by pouring contempt on it.

Let's each do that as Crystal leads us first in a solo stanza. (When I Survey the Wondrous Cross v. 1) Then we will sing the same stanza. Let's remain seated for it.

The Lord be gracious to you.

The Lord be gracious to me.

And all God's people said,

Amen.