

2024 Mark 9

I cannot teach our lesson today. Our Lord Jesus has to. The lesson is on pride and I cannot teach this lesson because I have pride. This is not to say I can teach about, greed, because I don't have greed, no, no, I do. But, hopefully I am not exercising some fashion of it while I am preaching. But with pride, well, I stand in front of you all, with a Degree and a Call, and I am just supposed to teach that the lowest are more important? I can say that yes, but how do I say it without being a hypocrite? Because we like our Degrees and status, we do. We take pride in them. And I am not different.

And so we might attempt a discussion on healthy self confidence versus sinful pride. And I think that is probably a helpful discussion to have. I do think faithful Christians can pursue degrees, and promotions, and seek to be good stewards of the gifts God has given them. And I do think faithful Christians should beware of sinful pride which seeks to put others down, which leans toward greed, and selfishness. Not only do I think that is good for Christians to ponder, James, in our Epistle lesson says it even better. Learn from him the boundaries of sinful pride.

Why are you fighting and quarreling? Because you covet. Because you want it your way. "And everyone else is foolish and wrong for not seeing it your way. When will they get a little common sense!" But don't you know they are thinking the same thing about you and your opinion? And so we bicker. Is that healthy self-confidence, or can we be honest and call it pride?

The world and we go around saying, "I need this, I deserve this," and "how dare you!?" And we do it to one another in the Church over things that God's word has not forbidden or commanded. Or perhaps even we find ourselves going against God's word because we have some better

knowledge or nuance as to why it doesn't apply to us or in that situation. We are quite good at self justifying.

James would have us repent. And James can teach this lesson on sinful pride, because he was martyred, giving up his life. Not saying, "I deserve this, or I need that God!" But, "I have Jesus, I have everything I need." This James would have us submit to God, draw near to God, he would have us ask of the Lord in humility, knowing we deserve nothing from him – and then rejoice in the blessings and peace he offers us nevertheless in Christ.

But that brings us back around to humility, the lesson our Lord must teach us. Because if you take away my food, my home, my internet – how could I say I would not be on my knees asking the Lord in desperation? How can I say I would not be quarreling, bickering, despondent, whining, and shoving with side and shoulder to get what I want, what I "need", what I "Deserve..."

And I think if we are honest, we would all do the same. And we know that intellectually, and we confess our brokenness and selfishness, but then go right back to our homes and food and internet and status and degrees. And again, this sermon is not saying we must give those up, it is saying that we are incapable of ever mastering this thing called pride.

It is as if there are two holes in a boat but they are ten feet apart. We can't reach them both.

When we are truly humbled by our contrition and the brokenness of the world, hooray, we have mastered our sinful pride, and we plug that hole. But then we start to feel good about that, and viola, another leak opens up due to our pride.

Or perhaps the words of Aaron Weiss might capture it better: Oh there, I go showing off again Self-impressed by how well I can put myself down! And there I go again, to the next further

removed level Of that same exact feigned humility! This for me goes on and on to the point of nausea.

And so how can we teach this? How can we crucify our selfish pride? We manufacture vows of monasticism and poverty – but we are proud of them. We insipidly brag about how little we are paid for how much work we do. We martyr ourselves for our own pride, “I did that and I did it for free! Look at my humility!” And in each instance we race back and forth between pride and humility to the point of exhaustion, or to the point where we just stop trying.

The disciples sure aren't trying very hard in our lesson today. Debating who is the greatest. They know they shouldn't be debating that, it's why they are ashamed to answer Jesus, they know better. But they, amongst themselves, they aren't even trying to be humble, that or they are competing: debating who is the most humble, and therefore the greatest, but then of course, not humble at all.

And so in the midst of them, and in the midst of us, Jesus sets a little child. A little child.

Someone who is even aware of these games about pride, and so they can't play them. They aren't savvy enough to try and trick themselves into the mental gymnastics and cognitive dissonance to convince themselves they are so humble. And they lack the ability to gain status on their own, how could they, they can't even wipe themselves, or tie their shoes, or do much of anything without help.

This is the one Jesus uses to teach us. “Receive them in my name. They may be last to some, but not to me.”

And so those with the greatest status in the Kingdom, are those who have no option but to be the least in our strati. They are the ones who can teach us. The little children who is unable to play

the game. Perhaps the homeless man under the overpass can teach us. And we think, “Well not THAT ONE, because he made his choices and he’s addicted.” But I disagree. That one can teach us, because by their own failings they have become so low. Which is even more humbling. They can’t blame anyone else, they are the reason they are low. And we Christians Supposedly come in here and say, in humility, “it is MY Fault I am a sinner.” But then turn around and brag about how good our decisions are? We can’t teach this. The orphan can. The kid at school who everyone has forgotten about and no one notices, they can teach this. And no, it can’t be the one person you’re thinking of from your school, because that means you remember them, it is the other kid you don’t remember at all. They might be able to teach us. The martyrs, those in prison, those who live in the garbage dumps of Guatemala. They can teach us lowliness. We can’t.

We still try. We can try and manufacture any of that lowliness, but that doesn’t cut it, we’ve been over that already, this is what monasticism was, “lets give it all away.” And in two days that becomes, “Look at us, we gave it all away!”

This is how insidious pride is. And so Jesus teaches it. And he says, “Don’t let the left know what the right is doing.” Which I think is an invitation to stop worrying so much about the motives of why we are doing things, and just do them if they are the right thing to do. That’s easier to worry about, I think. So, “is this thing the right thing to do? Would God have me do it?” Then I should do it whether I want to or not, whether my pride is hurt or increased by it, in spite of my feelings. That’s the Lord’s teaching.

And it isn’t without an example. As he leaves his throne to take on flesh and dwell amongst us prideful sinners. The omnipotent God becomes not just like, but actually a little child, so helpless. And then, perhaps even a greater test, in adulthood he, with more teaching and more

authority than all... submits to governing authorities, even corrupt ones, and is dragged off to trials and beaten and killed.

Is this a fake humility? Or was the pain real? It was real. The suffering, the betrayals, the heartache, the cries and tears. All real. And all endured to forgive us of our selfish pride. To forgive us of our insincerity. To forgive us of all our sins, that we may be Children of God, with cleansed hearts and minds in the eyes of the Father.

And, if we want to talk reasons for pride. We must note that in our text today Jesus predicts this. His death, and, more notable, his resurrection. It's hard to understate how significant the Passion Predictions are. Jesus' victory is not a fluke. It's not God the Father, deciding to bless him with a resurrection as if he might do the same to us if we please him or something. No, this is *the plan*. This is the promise that will be made true. This is the promise, that is so impossible, that, if he can keep this – he can keep every other promise too.

Promises to us, that our pride is forgiven, that our sins are washed away, that we are God's Children, that we will rise on the last day too. Those are impossible promises, aren't they? No one can keep them! Except maybe, no - assuredly, this one who predicted his death and resurrection and actually pulled it off!

Let this one teach you. Let him show you what sacrificial humility is in a real incarnation, in a real Cross. And when you fall short of his example, which you will, when you find that wicked beast of pride poisoning even your best works and trying to turn them into a trophy... well defy the pride that would have you look at yourself and look to Jesus and let him show you what forgiveness is: a free pardon, a full cleansing, a debt fully paid, and a promised eternity with

Him. That is yours, and that, finally, is something we ought boast it, because it has nothing to do with how good we are, but how good he is. God be praised. Amen.