

Sermon Draft

Text: Matthew 18:1–20

Sermon: “Humble Heart”

What kind of posture do you assume when you are sorry for what you did or said, when you’re seeking forgiveness? Remember when you were a child, or your children were young. When caught doing something we were not supposed to how did we approach our parents when they called us by our full name. What was our posture as we approached? It’s all about forgiveness. Without the mercy of God, where would we be? With that in mind, let us consider our posture when receiving that grace from God. We’ve observed bad posture, half-hearted smoke-screen posture, manipulative repentance from people posture that casts doubt on whether they are truly repentant.

Our Gospel does not start out with anything penitent at all. Call it *posturing*. Bad posturing. ***“The disciples came to Jesus, saying, ‘Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’”*** (v 1). And bringing about a complete reversal to the motive and ideas of the disciples, Jesus ***“called to him a child, put him in the midst of them and said, ‘Truly, I say to***

you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven’” (vs 2–3).

This is not a confirmation that children are sinless. The only reason an infant is so cute has to do with his complete inability to act upon what he is thinking. Jesus is speaking of becoming children in the sense of the status of the child who possesses nothing but needs everything. A child has nothing, needs everything.

Who is the greatest? Whoever humbles himself like this little child. One who assumes the status of complete dependence has nothing, needs everything.

Is that you? No claims, no sufficiency? Never feel a little bit proud of the fact that we made it to church today, during this pandemic. More Sundays than well you know who’s not here today! Have you ever began a sentence or a thought with “At least I . . .”? Do you ever accept a compliment about a job well done without thinking, “God is gracious to let me accomplish that!”?

It is not the most brilliant, the strongest, or the bravest among us who is the greatest. It is the humble and the dependent. I shall now assume the penitent's posture. A key phrase in our text is "Whoever humbles" or "will humble": "Whoever will humble himself..." (v 4). That means someone who is lowly, who claims nothing, and who makes no demands. Recognizes that she or he has nothing, needs everything. Is that you and me? Apology with our exception or excuse.

Let's explain it this way. There is a relationship involving a father and a son. The father failed miserably throughout the relationship. He was a bad father. He drank too much; he was physically and verbally abusive since the son was a little boy. But now at the age of 18, the young man notices a change in his father. He is stopped drinking; he approaches his son with a certain posture. "Son, I have done a lot of bad things. I want you to know the alcohol was responsible. Your mother and I never saw eye to eye. So, I drank. And when I drank, it caused me to treat you like I did. I'm asking for your forgiveness."

What do you think? Surely, he was doing as Jesus tells us: ***“Before you can get the speck out of another’s eye get the plank out of your own.”***

Surely, he’s doing what Jesus says, right? Or is he? Did he have what it takes? Is this being lowly, claiming nothing, and making no demands? Has nothing, needs everything?

We can understand why the son has a problem with this, apology. “I have an excuse. The drinking. Your mom. I was at fault quite a lot, sure, but not completely at fault. I have something a bit of an excuse.” I’m sure you can do much better with your penitent posture, your ability to be humble. Have *nothing*, need *everything*.

The father sees that his son is struggling with his apology. The boy knows it is his “duty” as a Christian to forgive, but it isn’t coming easily. So, the father tries again, Round 2. Here is what the father adds to the mix: “Son, Jesus says you have to forgive or else he won’t forgive you.” How is the boy feeling now? Dad is quoting Jesus. How timely, how religious, how pathetic! Why does it sound so wrong in this setting coming from this father?

Because the father is not far from the arrogance that caused the disciples to ask who was the greatest in the kingdom. In fact, this is sounding worse. Because a true penitent heart that seeks forgiveness gives up any hope of his own righteousness. He does not see in any way where he deserves forgiveness. Has nothing, needs everything. The father's confession of sin is contaminated.

Why do we believe our confession of sins has merit? We think our confession of sin has personal merit. Our penitence gives us permission to rise above another's lowly state, whereby we can defend ourselves at least in part. Why do we think we qualify to be forgiven? "Qualifying" is not us being humble, being lowly, claiming nothing, and making no demands. We know we fail even at this, that is being humble.

Who is he that is so vulnerable? Who has this posture? Only Christ our Lord! Only the one who knew no sin but became sin for us. The only one who would have proper justification not to forgive us is the only one whose very nature would never consider not pouring out his mercy on us.

It is only the God-man, Jesus Christ, who humbled Himself, made no claims, came with no demands, but bowed lowly in a way we could never accomplish. The penitent's posture in its purity is the posture assumed on the cross. The one who had everything, needed nothing, became the one who had nothing, needed everything. This moves one offended to a crushed pride and a humility that can only marvel in the sacrifice of the Savior and begin a movement to want to forgive. Therein lies the kingdom, reflecting the very nature of God Incarnate, dwelling among us now in the Holy Sacrament we are about to receive! Christ crucified, who submitted to his Father's judgment with no demands but bowed lowly, is Christ arisen.

By his pure posture of humility, we are forgiven! Forgiven for thinking we might be a contender for the greatest, at least, somehow a little better than the worst. We are not, but we are forgiven! Forgiven for thinking our apology is a little better if it comes with a little bit of an excuse. It's not, but we are forgiven! We have nothing, need everything, but we are forgiven!

Think about who Jesus conveys as “the greatest” among us. As he uses a little child as his object lesson and begins to teach the disciples how extremely in error their ideas are, we will find that the Gospel proclaims something quite different than the prevailing culture suggests. A culture of pride, arrogance, and hate. We need to listen to Jesus and humble ourselves, yes like little children. We are not worthy of forgiveness; we cannot earn it or buy it. But the gift of forgiveness is ours. Given from the One who desires to forgive and does so. So, we now can forgive as we have been forgiven.

Christ’s forgiveness moves us to the penitent’s posture and a humble heart, a confession that acknowledges we have nothing and need everything and the Lord does give us everything so let us open our lips to declare his praise, living by the Spirit who brings absolution. What a wonderful gift we have been given through the One who humbled Himself for us. And He did all this out of love. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Thank you, Jesus!

Amen

