

Sermon Draft

Text: Proverbs 25:2–10

Sermon: Humility

This Sunday is the Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost which means we are halfway through our journey of the Pentecost season. The Old Testament Reading from Proverbs is our text. Our theme is humility. Of course the perfect example of humility or living a humble life is our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Collect of the Day echoes this same thought of lowering oneself by praying that we “follow the example of Your Son in true humility” and “avoid ungodly pride.” Our Psalm picks up on this same theme. The psalmist is eager not to exalt himself: ***“O Lord, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high”*** (Psalm 131:1). He directs Israel to hope in the Lord. The Epistle from the Letter to the Hebrews presents Jesus being led outside the camp to suffer for us (Hebrews 13:12). We are led to follow him in humility to the site of his suffering and thus to endure his reproach (13:13).

This humility leads to practical results in our lives. We are to show “brotherly love”; we are not to “neglect hospitality to strangers”; we are to visit those in prison and keep the marriage bed in purity (13:1–4).

All the Propers are a message of humility before God that leads us to service and humility toward others.

There’s an old story told of a young man named Icarus. Icarus and his father are trapped on an island they wish to escape. The only way they can think to get off the island is through the air, to fly like a bird.

So, Icarus’s father makes wings for them out of feathers and attaches them to their bodies with wax. He warns Icarus not to fly too close to the ocean, thus dampening the wings with moisture, and not to fly too high, too close to the sun, and risk melting the wax. So off they fly, safely on their way.

But young Icarus finds it all to be so thrilling that he ignores his father’s advice and soars upward toward the sun.

Yes, the sun melts the wax, and Icarus falls into the sea and drowns.

God does not want us to try to fly up to him, to construct wings of our knowledge or piety to attempt to get to him (Proverbs 25:6–7). God is a God of unapproachable glory when we try to get to him in such a way. Rather God descends to us and shows himself to us, even gives himself to us, in Christ and his sacrificial death and resurrection. We are not Icarus. We are Christians to whom God shows himself in love and mercy.

We often think of God as a being up high and far away. He is up in heaven, he is glorious and powerful, and we are not. All this is true. But often we go a little further and imagine that we must climb to him, ascend in our thinking and behavior to be with him. This is a dangerous thought. While the distance between us and God is real, we must be careful when we consider how to travel that distance. How do we think about God?

How do we know anything about him? Do we go investigate and discover God like a science project? Or does God come down to us and reveal and give us knowledge about him?

We all have played the game of hide-and-seek. Someone hides, and another person counts to ten and then goes out in search of the hidden person. The seeker must find the one who is hiding. The hidden person must be quiet and still and not be found.

God plays a different version of this game with us. God hides himself, but he wants to be found (Proverbs 25:2). He hides himself in things we don't expect. A crucified and dead man on a cross. The lowly humble preaching of pastors. The strange and insignificant gifts of water in Baptism and bread and wine in the Supper. He "hides" there, and we can't see him in his glory; he doesn't look as if he's there. But his Word promises he is present with his gifts of mercy and grace. When we hear his Word, God is present with us, forgiving us and making us new.

Humility in thinking about God leads us to display true humility toward others.

God is hidden to us for now physically and infinitely beyond our thinking. The second verse of our text states that it is the glory of God to conceal things. The things that God conceals are actually himself. God by nature is beyond our thinking. He is hidden from us since he is our Creator. Think of ants trying to understand the human brain. God is far beyond our understanding. This calls for humility before him in our thinking about him. We cannot pretend to understand or explain God. Rather we humble ourselves and allow God to reveal himself. God has to come to us! Revealed Himself to us. This he does in many ways but especially through His Word and Sacraments.

If we fail to be humbled before God, we can fall prey to speculation and imagining and making things up about God. This is a devilish temptation that mirrors Lucifer's attempt to exalt himself into heaven.

The warning not to put oneself forward in the king's presence (v 6) applies here. Rather, we lower ourselves and are promoted by God's gracious revealing of himself. This is the point Jesus is making in the parable of the wedding banquet in today's Gospel (Luke 14:7–11).

God reveals himself to us in ways that are likewise beyond our thinking. We cannot ascend to God; rather he descends to us and shows himself to us by the Word. The ultimate and central revelation is Christ himself. Hebrews 13 says that Jesus suffered outside the camp to sanctify us. This suffering and making us holy is the ultimate showing of God himself. The awful spectacle of blood and crucifixion is the revelation of the hidden God. Christ's cross is the way God chooses to show himself to us: in love and mercy and forgiveness. The great, glorious God comes to us now in small, humble ways: word, water, supper.

The humble revelation of God is our “promotion.” God’s self-abasement is our ascension to his grace and presence. God’s lowering of himself into our place means we are now with him in his presence through Christ.

Humility before God, acknowledging how much he is beyond us, leads to humility toward others. God is the servant who, in Christ, reaches below himself to lift us up. This action shapes and forms us into servants who do the same in our vocations. We do not promote ourselves over others or seek to act in power toward others. We so often fail in this as we like to be first or we think our way is the only way. We want to be number one and every time we sin, we are promoting ourselves to this position, or we are trying to.

Instead let us seek to be like Christ in humble service toward mankind. Let us use the gifts and powers he has given us to lift up those around us. Like our outreach to our community, the gift cards we share, the community meals, school supplies for Romeo and all the other things we do in our daily lives to help those in need.

Proverbs tells us to deal with our neighbor in humble ways.

We do not seek to humiliate or win a victory over our neighbor but rather to treat him well, not reveal secrets, and settle disputes privately. The center of our dealings with others is how God has dealt with us. True humility before God (he comes to us, not the other way around) leads to humility and service toward others.

We don't figure out and find God. He reveals himself and shows himself to us in Christ. What a gift! The glorious God is humble and lowly. That humble, lowly God forms us to be humble and lowly people. We serve one another when we seek to be the kind of people God has made us to be and re-created us to be in Christ.

Amen