

Pentecost 12C Proper 17

September 1, 2019

Rev Ken Wratten at St Luke's, Hollister

Sirach / Ecclesiasticus 10:12-18 The cost of human pride

Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16 Let mutual love continue. Show hospitality. Honor marriage.
Be content with what you have.

Luke 14:1, 7-14 Be humble, include the needy without thought of reward.
Those who humble themselves will be exalted.

I remember in my mid-30s having a deep discussion with a friend at work about our climbing the corporate ladder. We got on the topic of job promotion, and I shared my thoughts on how I would use a management position in the company; but of course that couldn't happen, because I didn't have enough experience. My friend said, "Ken, you seriously underestimate what skills you have." I thought about that statement for days; and in fact I have never forgotten it. That short comment changed my self-perception for the rest of my life. It brought into focus for me the difference between humility and low self-esteem. The lessons today speak to the dangers of pride, and the blessings of practicing humility.

Jesus challenged the guests at a dinner about the way they tried to seat themselves, jostling for the places of higher honor. Then he went a step further, challenging the host of the dinner over his choice of invitees. His point was that these decisions and actions were driven by pride: but Jesus was teaching about a life driven by humility. Jesus was teaching that humility generates spiritual authority and power in God's Kingdom.

John Ruskin (an English art critic) once wrote, "I believe the first test of a truly great man (person) is his humility. I do not mean by humility, doubt of his own power, or hesitation in speaking his opinion. But really great men have a ... feeling that the greatness is not in them but through them; that they could not do or be anything else than God made them."

Richard Foster, in his book, *Celebration of Discipline* describes a spiritual discipline that he names 'submission' – and it describes 'humility'. He states that humility produces freedom from the terrible burden of always needing to get our own way. Needing to get our own way causes at least two problems. First, we will certainly fail sometimes, and then get angry, and fight to be right. Think about how often in your life a disagreement became an issue of needing to be right. The actual issue stopped being the issue at all; it was more about being 'right'. Secondly, getting our own way places us above the other person. Humility is about submitting ourselves to the premise that we do not need to always get our own way. Almost always, it just isn't going to matter.

When we allow humility to be a spiritual discipline for us, it allows us to value other people; to love people unconditionally, to not expect getting something in return; to not require that people say a certain thing, or act a certain way.

Humility is NOT the same thing as low self-esteem, or self-contempt. It honors our station as children of God. Jesus modeled the power of humility; in choosing humanity; washing disciples' feet; going to the cross. These are very clear examples of humility, not low self-esteem.

Paul taught that this life of servanthood and humility included; husband submitting to wife and wife to husband; master to slave and slave to master; father to child and child to father. All of these cultural lines of demarcation are to be erased in our life under God's reign.

An important exception to this call to submission is that it can never support abuse.

Seven acts of submission to integrate into our faith journey are offered by Foster:

1. Submission to God; pray at morning and night; submitting ourselves this day to God; for God to do with us as He pleases.
2. Submission to Scripture; hearing, receiving, and obeying; applying it to our life; making it live in us.
3. Submission to our family; listen to family members; be willing to share; put down the paper (smart phone), say 'I'm sorry'.
4. Submission to neighbors and people we meet in the course of our day; bring favorite pet toy for their dog, baby sit; share a great dessert.
5. Submission to the believing community; including spontaneous opportunities for little gifts of service. (Ken Truver – preschool grandfather came twice a week for two years to water plants. Many people here – Silent Servers)
6. Submission to the broken and despised; to be among them. Food Bank, homeless shelter, Chamberlains.
7. Submission to the world; live as a responsible member of an increasingly irresponsible world.

Humility IS: valuing our relationships so much that we place our relationships higher than having to get our own way.

Humility IS NOT low self-esteem, or self-contempt.

Humility MATTERS to God because it honors God; humility honors God's love for us; humility acknowledges the source of our strengths; and humility demands that we honor each other.

In these ways we think like the servant Jesus Christ, and we are transformed.
Amen.