

### **Luke 14:1, 7-14**

*On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely.*

*When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. "When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, 'Give this person your place,' and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher!'; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."*

*He said also to the one who had invited him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."*

There is a saying about love that true, at least I think it's true. It comes from when a child asks a parent about love. It happens with almost every adolescent child, but usually only the mother gets the question put to them. The question is, "How will I know when I am in love?"

Often the parent tries to explain love. They start talking about relationships and attraction and the outward signs of love: you know, the flowers, the candy, the looks, the laughing at jokes that aren't all that funny, things like that. The child typically just stares, not quite grasping how it all fit together. Finally, the mother says, "Trust me honey. You'll know it when you see it."

I think humility is like that. And so is it's opposite, pride. I can try to explain the dynamics and the theology of humility. I can tell you about the dangers of pride and follow up my explanation with Scriptural references. When I am done, I typically will get the nods and the smiles, but, the reality for most people is that it comes down to: "You will just know them when you see them." You see, the truth is that humility and pride are personal things, like love, and must be understood on a personal level in order to connect them to God's truth. Come to think of it, most truths in Scripture are the same way.

The truth is that it is hard for me, or anyone, to stand up here and convey to you a definition of humility without relating it to something you can wrap your heart around. I was talking to another member of the clergy during the week and this week's passage came up. Yeah, I know, it's a clergy thing, I guess. Most people talk about vacations and what restaurants they went to. We, clergy, often get to the passages for the upcoming Sunday. Their comment this week was, "This is always a hard one." I think that's true, but, I also think that you will know it, you will know what it looks like, when you see it. Your eyes will open when you experience it.

So I thought that maybe the best way to convey humility and pride is to show it to you through some stories.

D. L. Moody, one of the best known the evangelist from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, before he really launched his ministry was a shoe sales clerk. One day he overheard a customer say that the world had not yet seen what God might do with someone completely sold out to Jesus Christ. So, Moody went home and prayed that day, asking God to help him be that person.

God used Moody as no other man in his generation. He went on to found the Moody Bible Institute and Moody Publishers. He spoke at conferences all around the world. One year at a Moody Bible Conference in MA, a large group of European pastors came to study. At that time, it was a European tradition that each night a visitor would put his or her shoes outside their room, expecting that hall servants would gather them up and clean and shine them overnight. The visitors did not realize that this custom hadn't made it to America.

The first night, Moody was walking along the dormitory halls after everyone had gone to bed and he noticed the shoes and remembered the custom from the times that he had been invited as an honored speaker at conferences in Europe. He decided that those shoes would be cleaned and he mentioned the need to some students that were with him, but all he got was silence and excuses. So, he went back to the dormitory and collected the shoes and spent much of the night polishing. When the European visitors opened their doors the next morning, their shoes were shined and ready to go. The Europeans had no idea who had cleaned their shoes and no one would have ever known except for the fact that someone saw his light on a checked on him during the night. Humility in the midst of worldly greatness.

Golfing great, Arnold Palmer, tells a story about the 1961 Masters tournament: "I had a one-stroke lead going into the final hole and had just hit a very satisfying tee shot. I was in really good shape. Things were looking good. I was on my way to win my first Masters.

"As I approached my ball, I saw an old friend standing at the edge of the gallery. He motioned to me and held out his hand. I proudly took his congratulatory handshake. As soon as I did, I knew I had lost my focus. No longer was it on the game. It had shifted on to how good I was. On my next two shots, I hit the ball into a sand trap, then put it over the edge of the green. I

missed a putt and lost the Masters, because for a moment, pride overcame me. It was a stupid mistake." Pride changes focus onto self instead of purpose.

The famous conductor and composer, Leonard Bernstein, had a great way of describing the power of humility. When he was conductor of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, a reporter asked him to name the most difficult instrument to play. Without hesitation, Bernstein replied, "Second fiddle. I can get plenty of first violinists, but to find someone who wants to play second fiddle with enthusiasm, now that's a real problem. The thing that most people don't understand is that without the second fiddle, we have no harmony in the orchestra." Pride takes away the real power of humility.

Finally, there once was a palace servant who longed to be a knight. He had a deep, deep desire to represent his king and he vowed that if he ever had a chance to be a knight he would serve his king as the noblest knight who ever lived.

One day his dream came true. At his knighthood ceremony he made a special oath to himself. He vowed that from that day forward he would bow his knees and lift his arms in homage to no one but his king.

As a knight, he was assigned to guard a remote city on the edge of the kingdom. On the day he took up his duties standing at attention in full armor at the city gate, an elderly peasant woman passed by on her way to the market. In a rickety old cart, she carried some vegetables she had grown and hoped to sell. As she passed the knight, her vegetable cart hit a bump and dumped all the vegetables. The peasant woman scrambled to get them back in her cart. She looked toward the knight hoping he would help her. The knight stood there, unmoved, holding his pose. He had vowed to never again bow his knees or lift his arms to anyone but his king.

Years passed, and one day an elderly one-legged man hobbled by on his old crutch. Directly in front of the knight, the old man's crutch finally gave out and broke in two. "Sir knight," the old man begged, "please reach down and help me to get up again." He held his position proudly and remembered he had vowed that he would neither stoop nor lift a hand for anyone but his king.

Decades passed, and the knight grew older. One day his granddaughter came by with arms raised and said, "Papa, pick me up and take me to the fair." But, even for his own granddaughter the knight would not stoop, because of his vow.

Finally, the day came for the king to come. The knight had waited for this day all his life. As the king approached to inspect him, the knight stood proudly and stiffly at attention. As he did, the king noticed a tear rolling down the proud knight's cheek. "You are one of my noblest knights," said the king, "why are you crying?"

"Your majesty," the knight replied, "I took a vow that I would bow and lift my arms in homage to you alone, but now that you are here I am an old man unable to keep my vow any

more. The years of standing here stiffly at attention, waiting for you to come, have taken their toll. The joints of my armor are rusted and I can no longer lift my arms or bend my knees." The wise king replied, "Perhaps if you had knelt to help all those people who passed by you, and lifted your arms to reach out to all the people who asked for your help, you would have been able to keep your vow today as you face your king."

Pride lifts up self above others. It distracts us from our purpose. It blinds us from seeing others and their struggles. It decays our lives and all the lives that we touch.

Humility, however, is like a lubricant. It is like a catalyst. With humility, your God given purpose soars. Your ability to bring Joy explodes. Your life brings life to others.

Pride and humility... You'll know them when you see them. But be aware, others also will know them when they see them, in us.

Amen