

Sermon 110815 Pride  
Scripture Mark 12: 38-44  
Sermon Title- My Name Is Pride

Each of the four gospels tells the story of Jesus Christ in its own way. The different gospels emphasize different aspects of the Lord and his story. In Mark's gospel, Jesus is like an action figure, moving quickly in and out of scenes, performing miracles and healings but saying very little. The teachings of Jesus, including the parables, appear much more often in the other gospels than they do in Mark. Today's gospel lesson from Mark is somewhat unusual in that it is a teaching story from Jesus.

In the first part of the teaching, Jesus condemns church leaders who proudly parade around looking to be treated with respect, who get the best seats in church and at banquets. They are greedy and prideful and Jesus condemns them. He then watches people give money to the church and exalts a poor woman who gives two copper coins. Jesus says, "Truly I tell you, this poor woman put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on." (Mark 12: 43-44)

Pride is a tricky emotion because we often say that we are proud. We regularly say we are proud about something or somebody or even ourselves. Sometimes it is a group that we are

proud of or are proud to be part of. Tuesday is the 240<sup>th</sup> birthday of the United States Marine Corps. The Corps was started on November 10, 1775. If you have ever spoken to a Marine or a former Marine, you know the extraordinary pride they have in their beloved corps, and rightly so. History has shown that the United States Marine Corps is one of the greatest if not the greatest fighting unit in world history. Their slogan or motto, always uttered between them, Semper Fidelis or Semper Fi is Latin for “Always Loyal.” In that way, pride is a virtue.

It is good to be proud of one’s children when they achieve or do some good. It is even a good thing to be proud of your own accomplishments. To do something that is difficult successfully, or to do the right thing at the right time is reason to feel good about yourself.

So if pride can be a good thing, why does Jesus condemn those who are so prideful? It is because pride can be very damaging to self and to others. What those Scribes that Jesus condemned were doing was holding themselves up as superior to others. That, my friends, is not being the person that Jesus calls us to be.

We find ourselves in another political season complete with presidential debates. Politics in this country are ugly, to say the least. It happens less and less for candidates to say, ‘I believe that

I am on the right side of this issue and my opponent is on the wrong side.’ Instead, it is more and more, ‘I’m good and he or she is evil.’ How often did you hear people say, “I’m scared to death that so and so might be elected.’ Fear is not a place to start from when voting. Americans have forgotten that a president of the US in time of crisis said, “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” People think that if someone will vote for a particular candidate, that means the person is stupid. When you engage in that thinking, you are putting you and your group as superior and others as inferior. That speaks to your own character and it is damaging to our nation. It’s like when Archie Bunker said, “I am not prejudiced. I love all those inferior people.”

One of the problems with pride, this inflated sense of your own status, is that it is easy to recognize in others and hard to recognize in yourself. There is a story of a Sunday school teacher who used a similar story to this Mark story from Luke’s Gospel. A Pharisee prayed, “God, I thank you that I am not like those other people” where the tax-gatherer prayed, “God be merciful to me because I am a sinner.” The teacher explained that the pious, self-righteous attitude of the Pharisee made him look down on the tax-gatherer. At the end of the class, the teacher asked one of the boys to say the closing prayer. The boy prayed, “I thank God that I am not like that Pharisee.”

We all can point to people who are prideful, who hold themselves above others, who like to brag about themselves, and who work hard to appear virtuous. We have a name for them, jerks. Jesus goes even farther by condemning them and using the poor widow in contrast.

Jesus does not call the poor widow humble and neither does the text, but she appears to be humble. What Jesus does point out is her behavior. She gave the meager two copper coins, a few pennies for us, but the two copper coins was what she had, as opposed to those who gave out of their abundance. She was not thinking of herself she was thinking of others. That is a way to look at this teaching from Jesus.

In this teaching, Jesus is challenging us to take a clear-eyed, hard look at ourselves. He is say, 'Who are you?' Are you the prideful one who is always thinking about yourself or are you the humble one who is always thinking about others? Maybe you are both. Maybe you are concerned about how others view you and you try to help others. If so, which side of you has the needle pointed toward it more often? How often do you speak well of yourself and critically of others? How often do you speak well of others and critically of yourself? If Jesus were here in this church today, which group would he put you in? Would you be in the self-directed group or would you be in the other-directed group?

It is interesting that Jesus picks the temple and uses church leaders to do this teaching. Churches are places where you often find judgmental people. Churches are places where people can try to appear virtuous. Churches are places where people can get self-righteous. Likewise, churches are places where you can find people who are other-directed. Churches are places where you can find humble people looking to do what they can to help others. Churches are places where you can find people with such generosity of spirit that they give of themselves endlessly.

In one small teaching moment, Jesus challenges us. He challenges church leaders and churchgoers alike. What kind of church do you want to be? What kind of an individual do you want to be? What kind of person does the Lord want you to be? He makes that very clear. He condemns the prideful and exalts the humble. How about you? How about your church? Before you answer that question, I'd like to share with you a poem by Beth Moore. The poem is called...

My name is Pride

My name is Pride. I am a cheater. I cheat you of your God-given destiny... because you demand your own way.

I cheat you of contentment... because you "deserve better than this."

I cheat you of knowledge... because you already know it all.

I cheat you of healing... because you are too full of you to forgive.

I cheat you of holiness... because you refuse to admit when you are wrong.

I cheat you of vision... because you'd rather look in the mirror than out a window.

I cheat you of genuine friendship... because nobody's going to know the real you.

I cheat you of love... because real romance demands sacrifice.

I cheat you of greatness in heaven... because you refuse to wash another's feet on earth.

I cheat you of God's glory... because I convinced you to seek your own.

My name is Pride. I am a cheater.

You like me because you think I'm always looking out for you. Untrue. I'm looking to make a fool of you.

God has so much for you, I admit, but don't worry... If you stick with me you'll never know.

Finally, from the book of Micah in the Bible, "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (6:8) AMEN

