

Luke 14:1, 7-14 and Proverbs 25:6-7a

This morning I'm reminded of the fable The Emperor's New Clothes. Let me summarize it for you in case you have never heard it or can't exactly remember it.

Hans Chrisian Anderson wrote:

Many years ago, there was an Emperor so exceedingly fond of new clothes that he spent all his money on being well dressed. Many years ago there was an Emperor so exceedingly fond of new clothes that he spent all his money on being well dressed. He cared nothing about reviewing his soldiers, going to the theatre, or going for a ride in his carriage, except to show off his new clothes. He had a coat for every hour of the day, and instead of saying, as one might, about any other ruler, "The King's in council," here they always said, "The Emperor's in his dressing room."

One day in the happy city where he lived among the many people who visited each day were a couple of swindlers who let it be known they were weavers of exquisite cloth with fine colors and patterns that became invisible to anyone who was unfit for his office or who was unusually stupid. Of course, the emperor wanted them to create fabric for his clothing and promptly hired them. They worked day and night with empty looms pretending to create the finest cloth. The emperor wanted to know how they were fairing but was unsure he would be able to see the cloth and didn't want to risk not being competent or even worse utterly stupid, so he sent a trusted advisor to check on the progress.

Even though he saw nothing on the loom he was too proud to say something lest the advisor be wrong about what he didn't see, so he profusely admired the cloth. Meanwhile the entire population of the city had been informed about this cloth and its properties. A while later the emperor sent another trusted advisor with the same results. Finally, the day came when the king was ready to see the cloth. Alas, there was no cloth on the loom, but the king crowed over its beauty and had clothing made for himself. As the clothing was finished it just happened to be the day he was to be in a great public procession. The swindlers took over the dressing of the emperor saying how fine the fabric was, it should only be handled by experts. They proceeded to move as though dressing the emperor while being observed by many of the emperor's advisors who could see no clothing but were not going to jeopardize their status by saying anything other than expressions of their admiration of the fine garments.

As the emperor processed through the streets of the city everyone admired his new clothing lest they be thought unfit or stupid. Until a little child saw him and shouted out, "But he hasn't got anything on!" The statement quickly spread through the crowd until the entire town cried out, "He hasn't got anything on!" The emperor shivered, for he suspected they were right. But he thought, "This procession has got to go on." So he walked more proudly than ever, as his noblemen held high the train that wasn't there at all. (adapted from the Jean Hersholt translation of the original story by Hans Christian Anderson https://andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/TheEmperorsNewClothes_e.html)

Although the actual moral of the fable is about someone pretending to be something they aren't, or another interpretation is that a person should speak up when they see an injustice, I see a very definite connection to pride. I want to be sure to say that it is not terrible to be proud of accomplishments when a person has worked hard to achieve them. It's not wrong to be proud of how your children are coming along in the world, whether it's winning a baseball championship with their team or winning an excellent

employment position. What is wrong is when the accomplishments are used to make another person feel less than, as though a child were saying, "Mine is better than yours. Na na na na na na." However, the pride I see in the parable is "I know I'm good enough to see this and no one is going to tell me any different." It's the pride of being so full of yourself that you cannot admit it when you are wrong. That is what I understand when the emperor continues his parade even though the people have seen through the swindler's charade.

Jesus warns against pride in his gospel reading from Luke reinforcing our lesson from Proverbs, "It is better to be told, 'Come up here,' than to be put lower in the presence of a noble." When a person thinks more highly of themselves than they ought to they are more likely to be embarrassed when it is pointed out they are not as important as they believe themselves to be. What Jesus suggests is that the people humble themselves and sit in a place that is not as honorable as they believe they deserve. Humility is the opposite of pride, the opposite of thinking of yourself more important than the other person. A person with humility acts as though everyone is on an equal footing despite the greater opportunities afforded by gender, race, or economic status, because we are all equal in God's eyes.

Humility does not mean you can be walked over because you think you don't deserve to be treated kindly. Humility is treating all people with kindness. Not patronizing them but realizing they are God's child the same as you are God's child. Perhaps it goes a step further and includes defending a person when the situation presents itself. At the pastor's Bible study Tuesday, a story was told about Adlai Stevenson at a dinner held at a university. The wait staff consisted of students on work study. One of the waiters had a pot of hot coffee ready to be poured when the man sitting next to Mr. Stevenson gestured wildly as he was telling a story, hitting the waiter's arm resulting in the pot of coffee being poured on Mr. Stevenson's suit. The student waiter's supervisor ran out and pulled him into the kitchen where he proceeded to yell at him and fire him. Much to both of their surprise Mr. Stevenson walked into the kitchen as this was taking place and spoke with the manager. He explained the incident was an accident caused by the man next to him and there was no need to reprimand the student. That demonstrates true humility when a person as important as Adlai Stevenson was, took the time to take notice of how a young waiter was being treated and corrected the situation.

Humility may be considered as the sense of equality among all individuals, seeing one another as though we are looking through the eyes of Christ. It is demonstrated by Jesus as he walked with all people, treating the shunned as friends and speaking to teach the religious leaders with his words of wisdom. We'd like to think that Jesus holds sinners in lower esteem than his followers, but does he? God loves all people, but loves those who follow Jesus in a different way than those who do not. Most people love their children in a different way than they love other children, but genuinely love and care for other children.

God sent Jesus for the whole world. God so loved the world... (John 3:16a). All people are created in the image of God and receive God's love and provision so there's no need for us to magnify our own greatness. God loves us for who we are. All glory be to God.