

“Humility”

Sermon Preached by Judith Rainforth
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Today this Gospel reading is so indicative of humility. There is a difference in humility and humiliation. Humiliation is to reduce someone to a lower position in one’s own eyes or other’s eyes, to make someone feel ashamed or mortified. Humility is not being proud or haughty, humiliation is, humility is not. When I am humble, I am not comparing myself to somebody else, because if I compared myself to somebody else, I either put them down or I put me down. Neither one is being obedient to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In Proverbs 11:2, we read *when pride comes then comes disgrace, but humility comes with wisdom.* We need to be obedient to God’s word, and we need to look at this text and see how the chief priests and the elders were being so egotistical and they were trying to put Jesus down, and he wouldn’t have it. He stood because he knew that what he was teaching was from the Lord. When they said, “By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority?” Jesus said to them, “I will also ask you one question, if you tell me the answer then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things.” Then the question came from Jesus, “Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?” They argued with one another because they knew they were caught in this trap. If we say it is human origin, we are afraid the crowd is going to turn on us, so they answered Jesus saying, “We don’t know.” Jesus said, “So neither will I tell you what authority I am doing these things.”

Then he went on to teach more, he went on to teach by using the example of two sons. A man said to his two sons, he went to the first and said, “Son, go and work in the vineyard today.” The son said, “I will not.” But later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second son and said the same. The son answered, “I go sir.” But he didn’t go. “Which of the two did the will of the father?” Jesus said exactly what you are believing. It was the first son who said, “I will not go.” But he went. Isn’t that the way we are sometimes?

One of the hymns today is *Here I am Lord, send me.* Do we listen to that call in our life? Jesus went on to tell them, “Truly I tell you the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the Kingdom of God ahead of you.” The reason he said that is because they came to believe in Jesus Christ. But these egotistical chief priests and elders were not there. In Psalm 25:2-3, we read, “*My God, I put my trust in you, let me not be put to shame nor let my enemies triumph over me. Let none who look to you be put to shame, rather let those be put to shame who are treacherous.*” So reflective of the Gospel reading.

What we need to do is we need to find ways to grow spiritually. How do you do that? How do you become humble and not humiliated? I have two favorite books, one is the Bible I have grown up with. When I was in confirmation class, I memorized the Commandments. Today I tell people, the Ten Commandments are kind of like the speed limit, they keep us safe. Do we always follow them perfectly? No, but we try. The other favorite book I have come in adulthood when I was asked to start treatment centers in hospitals in Nebraska and California. It was such an honor to do that because I got to start from scratch. I modeled the program after the Hazelden Program which has been successful for many years. That is when I became very familiar with the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. They are very much like the Commandments. I want to read those to you today because they talk a lot about humility. No matter what, I think all of us are recovering from something. It might not be an addiction to alcohol, drugs, maybe it is an addiction to work. There are all kinds of addictions out there. These 12 steps again remind me of the Ten Commandments. They were written many years ago by a Christian man, Bill W. and his Doctor Bob. These can be used by Christians or people from other faith traditions, so when I read these, you will see that by the way the wording is.

The first step is we admitted we were powerless over alcohol. Again, this can be any addiction. Their lives had become unmanageable.

2. Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. That in itself is very humbling.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrong. Another very humbling step.
6. We are entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly ask God to remove our shortcomings.
8. Make a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continue to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood him. Praying only for knowledge of his will for us and the power to carry that out.

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we try to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

It's all about, not humiliation, but about being humble. We could be all day thinking of verses that talk about humility in the Bible. One of my favorites is from Micah 6:8, "He has told you o mortal what is good and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with God." Finally, back to Psalm 25:4-5. "Show me your ways O Lord and teach me your paths, lead me in your truth and teach me for you are the God of my salvation, in you have I trusted all the day long."

Let us pray. Gracious and loving God help us to remember your words. Help us to pursue spiritual growth. Help us to know that you are our Lord and Savior. Help us this day to be your hands and feet as we work for your glory. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen