

Let us pray,

Lord, remind us to not take ourselves too seriously, and put ourselves amongst one another, not above.

Amen.

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Im better than you.

Have you ever said that to someone or probably more likely thought that?

Or have you ever been on the receiving end of someone who thought they were better than you and treated you like less than?

Its not a great feeling.

And yet, a lot of our society is about fighting one another to get to the top.

To be better than others.

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Go to college, go to grad school, get your doctorate, find the most lucrative career and make a bunch of money.

And if you don't do that, then you will lose out on life and everyone else will be better than you!

The horror!!

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I haven't actually heard anyone ever say it like that, but that is the implication that they are referring too.

If you aren't better than others, then you are less than others.

Last week we talked about how ancient Mesopotamia had an honor/shame society where honor was limited.

I am not so sure that we have graduated much further than that today.

Honor/shame might not be the most important thing anymore.

But we have replaced it with wealth and power or rather the outward expression of wealth and power.

And I want to be clear, there is nothing inherently wrong with having money or holding a position of power.

If it wasn't good to be exalted, Jesus wouldn't emphasize the humble eventually being exalted.

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So like I said, there isn't anything wrong with being wealthy or being powerful.

Issues arise in the intention, however.

What do we do with that wealth and power and what did we do to obtain that wealth and power.

That's what matters to God.

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The lesson for today is a reminder that we are not to separate ourselves from our fellow humans.

That we on our own are no different than anyone else.

Each and every human has to live the human experience.

And all of us are given slightly different cards that make life easier or harder than other people.

But we all suffer and we all are just human.

So none of us have the authority to proclaim that we deserve the seat of honor or that we deserve to be exalted.

Because we are all just human.

Jesus reminds us that humility requires the banishment of our desire to be better than other people.

And only through God can we, not just as individuals, but all people, be lifted up and exalted, not by our own desires or ambitions.

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Let me tell you something, the candidacy process and call process for ordination and called ministry is such a bizarre and countercultural process.

It took me right up until the very end to realize in my seminary journey that my candidacy committee wasn't looking for me to be better than my classmates.

See I thought I had to be the smartest and most talented person.

I thought that I had to be better than the other seminarians in order to be approved.

So I read a lot, I studied a lot, I took as many classes as I could, I got involved.

I did all the things that I thought would separate me from the rest of the pack.

But in the end, I learned that no matter how hard I tried to be better than my classmates, they too were trying to be better than everyone else and we all came out as some pretty smart, talented and qualified pastors.

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Well shoot, We are all now on a level playing field, so now what?

I did all that work for nothing????

How are we going to get the church that we wanted or the synod that we wanted, if we aren't better than each other??

Well, speaking for just myself, it was a painful realization that I was not suppose to be trying to get a church that I wanted.

I was suppose to be following the call, the Holy Spirit.

I really liked the church I was at before and I really like being the pastor here at Grace.

So I don't want to come across as saying that I didn't like where I was or where I am at.

I did and do!

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But what I am trying to say is that my intention was wrong.

I had to learn to let go of what I wanted, and to hold onto what God wanted for me.

See God wants all of us to be exalted.

But God doesn't want us to exalt ourselves.

God wants us to give God the opportunity to exalt us in the way that God is desiring to exalt us.

Because what we think we want, is not always what God wants for us.

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I am not sure that God wants empty vessels that are mindless servants of God, either.

But what I do think God wants are fully engaged followers who walk alongside their God, to experience this life in all of its negatives and positives, to help us come to a realization that to

live a “good” life, is to humble ourselves so that God can exalt us the way God wants to exalt us.

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I think its actually fairly easy to know when someone exalted themselves and when someone was exalted by others or by God. The self exalted do everything in their power to bolster their own name, their own power, their own legacy.

The self exalted only care about being on top, and don’t care about those who are below them.

However, the called or the Godly exalted, if true, use their exaltedness not to bolster their own name or their own legacy, but to lift up others and exalt others.

They don’t try to push others away.

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The Godly exalted lift others up and use their platform to exalt others.

Where the self exalted use their platform to push others down so that they look even more exalted.

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To be called as a pastor is not to be called to be better than others.

It is a call to proclaim the Gospel, to administer the love of God through the sacraments, and lift up sinners and proclaim them forgiven.

To be called a christian, is not to be called to be better than others.

It is a call to go into the shadows, to find those who don't want to be found or who are hidden by the world, and bring them into the light.

To be called a Christian, is to humble oneself, be amongst the lowly and outcast and to be the physical reminder of Jesus Christ in the world today.

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My prayer, my wish is that we here at Grace continue to humble ourselves so that we may allow God to exalt us, so that we can work with God to exalt others.



May we continue to grow into the humble disciples God is calling us to be for the world.

Amen.