

2-17-2010, Ash Wednesday C
Chapelwood UMC, Lake Jackson

From Humility to Glory:
Humility Does Not Seek to Be Glorified
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Today we begin the forty days of Lent. One of the most important things we can do during this Lenten season is to humble ourselves before our God. Humility is vital to authentic Christian living. Oddly enough, the road to real glory leads through humility. So, our theme during at Chapelwood during these forty days of Lent will be "From Humility to Glory." We will follow Jesus as he leads us from humility to glory.

Let us begin by asking what humility is. There are many ways of describing humility. This evening you will come forward to have ashes imposed on your foreheads. By receiving these ashes you are saying that you recognize that you are a human being, subject to the powers of sin and death. That is humility.

True humility is simply to recognize the truth about ourselves. The truth is that we are human beings, not God. When we look at ourselves in the light of who God is, we don't have to work very hard at being humble.

Isaiah tells us that in the year that King Uzziah died, Isaiah saw the Lord God sitting on a throne high and lifted up, and the hem of his robe filled the temple. There were angels attending the Lord and singing of God's glory. Isaiah's reaction was one of utter humility. He said, "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"

That's genuine humility. True humility is to recognize that God is holy, and we are not. God is eternal, and we are not. God is all powerful and all wise, and we are not. The better we know God, the more humble we will become.

The problems come when we compare ourselves to others and come to the conclusion that we are more or less than they are. When we decide we are more than someone else, we are guilty of false pride. When we decide we are less than someone else, we are guilty of false humility.

The strangest and most twisted form of false pride is trying to convince others that we are the most humble of people. Jesus warns us against the false humility of trying to impress others with how pious and humble we are. We need to heed that warning tonight.

After the service tonight, we will all leave with ashes on our foreheads. Let me ask, how long should we leave those ashes on our foreheads? Should you leave them through the evening? Some of you will go from this service to a restaurant. Should you leave those ashes on your forehead? Or you may go home to family members who chose not to attend this service. Should you leave the ashes on your forehead at home? Should you be careful to preserve your ashes when you get up in the morning and go to school or work? Should you have ashes on your head throughout the Lenten season?

What would be the purpose of leaving those ashes on your forehead? To say to people you encounter that you are an humble penitent, bearing the mark of the cross on your head?

No. You don't receive this mark as a message to others. By receiving the mark of the Cross, you are saying to God, "I bow before your holiness in repentance for my sinfulness. I

recognize that you and you alone are the source of life, and apart from you I have no life at all.” This mark is a message to God and to God alone.

The message has been delivered. If you truly humble yourself before God tonight, you don’t need that mark to remind yourself. God has gotten the message. And it’s nobody else’s business. This mark has nothing to say to anyone else.

So, Jesus says to us, “Whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

If you are genuinely humble, people won’t need to see a mark on your forehead to know it. They will see it in the way you treat them.

The way to glory is not to seek glory, but to glorify others. Humility leads to glory.

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