

There's a theme running through our lessons this morning.

It has to do with the danger of pride.

Jesus tells a parable about how to act when you're the guest  
and another one about what to do when you're the host.

The first parable reminds me of the church where I grew up.

The pastor would stand up at the beginning of the service  
and look for any visiting pastors. If he saw one he'd say,  
"Brother So-and-So (it was always Brother there),  
come sit up here."

And when Jesus says, "all who exalt themselves will be humbled,  
and those who humble themselves will be exalted,"  
it reminds me of something I heard from my parents growing up:

"You are no better than anybody else," they said,  
"but no one else is better than you."

When I hear Jesus tell these two parables,  
it stirs up childhood memories of church  
and of the lesson my parents told me over and over:  
you're no better than anyone else,  
but no one else is better than you.



But let's dig a little deeper, because there's a temptation  
when you study scripture and it seems to line up perfectly  
with the values you take for granted.

You can start thinking you're qualified to judge  
who is following Jesus the right way, and who isn't.  
Who is acting pridefully, and who isn't.

Jesus is talking to the Pharisees this morning.

Pharisees are honored in their society,  
and it might make you want to ask if Jesus' message is for everybody,  
or just for the people society respects and honors.

What about those of us who don't struggle with pride, but with inferiority?

Honestly, that's what people are struggling with a lot these days.

Not everybody got told they were as good as everybody else  
as children.

In fact, a big contribution from women theologians in recent decades  
is to point out this problem to their male counterparts.



But this not just a women's issue. Or a racial issue.

Sadly, a lost sense of identity and self-worth is almost a pandemic  
in our country right now.

If it's not you it's your child or your spouse or your niece  
or nephew or neighbor.

And when I look carefully at those childhood memories

I see that not everybody was treated equally at my church growing up.

There was never a SISTER So-and-So who got invited to sit with the pastors.

And nobody who had dark skin was allowed to live in my hometown  
and hear how equal we all are.

And even in my own family, Granny Tallant stood beside the table  
while Papa and the men ate dinner,  
which sort calls into question the values I was being taught.



So, what do we do with this lesson on pride?

If the people who talk about us being equal don't live that way,  
and if Jesus is only talking about humility  
to a bunch of privileged people,  
do his words only apply if you are one?

Can I reject Jesus' parables and the other readings this morning  
if I'm a woman? Or if the world has told me I'm "less than"?

That's certainly an option, and one that some people choose.

In theology we call that a "hermeneutic of suspicion."

In Hollywood we call it, "Being a writer on She-Hulk."

But thankfully Anglican Christianity doesn't go very far down that road,  
because at our best we read scripture with humility,  
and with the belief that there is something special about Jesus' words,  
and with an eye to discovering what the Holy Spirit says  
through those words to point us to the COMMON good.



Our first lesson this morning begins with this beautiful line of wisdom.

"The beginning of human pride is to forsake the Lord," it says;  
"the heart has withdrawn from its Maker."

What happens to us when our heart withdraws from its Maker,  
when it withdraws from God?

I think it starts to believe whatever the world says about it.

Some of us believe we matter more than other people,  
and some of us believe we matter less than other people,  
and the common thread is that when you believe  
either of those lies, your heart has withdrawn from its Maker.

Jesus is talking to highly respected Pharisees,  
but he's speaking a universal truth:  
it is a sin to think that your identity, your value, your worth,  
comes from anything other than being  
a Beloved Creation of God.

Maybe the sin is not being pride-full or pride-less  
but believing the world's opinion of you instead of God's,  
and if that's true, maybe we can find a little more sympathy  
for one another as brothers and sisters trapped in sin.



And how do we get out of that sin?  
The Spirit shows us how in Hebrews this morning.  
“Let mutual love continue,” it says. Let MUTUAL love continue.

Mutual love shields against pride and shame alike,  
because mutual love sees in both you and every person you encounter,  
absolute belovedness as God's creation.

Belovedness is God's original gift to us,  
and if we abandon that gift, whether to pride or insecurity,  
we withdraw our hearts from God.



Mutual love remembers people in prison as if we ourselves were in prison,  
remembers people being tortured as if we were being tortured,  
remembers those gathering at Common Ground this afternoon  
as if we, too, were living on the streets.

Mutual love remembers those burdened with pride as if we were proud  
and those burdened with shame as if we, too, were ashamed.



2,000 years ago Jesus warned the Pharisees about the sin of pride,  
but the Spirit speaks through those words to call us to mutual love.  
Because only through mutual love can we truly understand  
the birthright that comes only from our Father in heaven.

Amen.