

St. Paul: On The Same page

08.25.13 Week #261

Day One: Proverbs 25:2-10
Take away the dross from the silver, and the smith has material for a vessel;⁵ take away the wicked from the presence of the king, and his throne will be established in righteousness.⁶ Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of the great,⁷ for it is better to be told, "Come up here," than to be put lower in the presence of a noble.

If you were to win an award like an Emmy or an Oscar, how would you react? Would you run up to the stage? Walk slowly and with dignity? Act embarrassed and surprised?

We have mixed feelings about humility. We say that we value it, and yet we crave attention. We say we admire humble people, yet we praise those who are in the spotlight the most.

When Solomon advises us not to put ourselves forward, he is not just recommending an effective posture, an image to fake. He compares a humble demeanor to removing the dross (the

"Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Luke 14:11

dirt) from silver ore. And he says that the king should remove the prideful from his presence because they are like dross. They will harm his kingdom.

The proud person is self-centered. But the humble person is centered on others. Humility is not putting ourselves down, it is putting others up.

So if a humble person wins a great award, they might run to the stage, eager for the chance to praise others. You are a winner, called by God to his kingdom! Whom should you thank on that day?

Prayer: Dear Father, you gave me everything. Thank you for your love, and for all your servants who led me in faith. Amen.

Day Two: Hebrews 13:1-17
Let brotherly love continue. ² Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. ³ Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.

“Angels unawares,” that’s an intriguing phrase. If you look in the bookstore or on the internet you’ll find lots of stories about people meeting a mysterious stranger – someone who turned up when they were in need and then suddenly disappeared! “Could it have been an angel???”

I don’t want to mock anyone’s sincere searching. And I do believe that God’s messengers, the angels, may sometimes take an active part in our lives. But for many people, angels have become simply an exciting ghost story, or a thrilling mystery. There is another possibility. God’s angels are not always spiritual beings.

The word “angel” means messenger, and it is not always used for the mysterious spirits that people like to speculate about. Instead, the

angel in this verse can even be people like us!

“Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them...” Over and over again in God’s word, we are called to be messengers and ambassadors ourselves. We are called to serve others. We are called to do humble things, to show love in simple ways, that send a powerful message to those in need.

Recently, there was a story in the news about a mysterious disappearing priest. He appeared at an automobile accident when a young woman, trapped in her car, was asking for someone to pray with her. He prayed, and he anointed her with oil. And then, when things settled down, he was nowhere to be seen!

A miracle? An angel? Yes! It was God’s work that an ordinary man who had been passing by was there to serve in a humble, simple way. He truly was God’s angel. And you can be also.

Prayer: Lord, your angels have blessed me. Lead me to be an angel, a messenger of your love, today. Amen.

Day Three: Luke 14:1-14

And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy. ³ And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?” ⁴ But they remained silent. Then he took him and healed him and sent him away. ⁵ And he said to them, “Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?” ⁶ And they could not reply to these things.

In the Old Testament lesson, Solomon shares the wisdom of being humble before the king. In our epistle lesson, the writer to the Hebrews reminds us to show love to one another, even to strangers. And now in the Gospel lesson, Jesus faces the religious rule-followers who are waiting to see if he will break the rules by healing a man on the Sabbath Day.

It is in this context that Jesus points out how obvious it is that they would all care for a simple animal in need on the Lord’s Day. And after this he tells them something similar to Solomon’s instruction, to take the lower place, the place of

humility, rather than the high place.

These two ideas are next to each other because they are related. This is what it means to take the lower place – not just that you take a back seat – but that you take a place of service to others. That you get down in the ditch with the donkey.

We would probably enjoy it if we chose a seat in the “nosebleed section” of the stadium only to be called up to the prestigious skybox. But Jesus calls us to take the lesser seat in order to love the sort of people who are gathered there. If we had the spirit of Jesus, we would prefer to stay in the cheap seats in order to serve the people there.

This is where Jesus was found. And this is where he is to be found today – in the lives of those who need him most, giving his life for those who need forgiveness and life.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I love it when people love me. Help me to be filled with your love, so that I can love the chance to love others. Help me to take the lower place, not for the sake of glory, but because you have already lifted me up. Amen.

Day Four:

⁷Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God.

Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith...

¹⁷Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Have you ever had someone “above” you who was not as smart as you? I’ve had times when I knew that I was right and my teacher was wrong! I’ve had jobs in which I was sure that I could be a better boss than my boss. My mother could probably tell you about lots of times that I was convinced I was smarter than my parents too.

And yet, strangely, God did not make me the boss. He didn’t make me the teacher. And he didn’t make me the parent – not right away. Instead, he called me to learn, sometimes even from people who might have been wrong. Maybe I did actually have a better answer. But my correctness was not always the most important thing.

There was a period of time in the Bible, the period of “the Judges,” in which “every man did what was right in his own eyes.” And what was the result? Even when they were right, the result was chaos and division. And when they were wrong, the result was the destruction of God’s people.

God calls us to imitate our spiritual leaders. That’s hard for me. I’m not sure anyone ought to imitate me. And yet, we can learn from our pastor’s failings as well as from the good things God works in him. And we obey our leaders, not slavishly, but because we are walking together, seeking God’s will together, and growing together in faith.

When our leaders are imperfect, we can still follow and help them to lead more effectively. And by working together humbly, obediently, and joyfully, we bring joy to the whole Body of Christ.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, my boss, my parent, my pastor, my spouse is not worthy of my obedience. But I am even less worthy, and yet you came to serve me. Give me a spirit of service that we may grow together joyfully. Amen.