

Sermon for Easter 7, 24 May 2020

1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11

'Humility in Christ'

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In today's reading from 1 Peter we hear these words

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God

Humble yourselves *therefore*

Humble yourselves for *this* reason, because *this* is the case

But for what reason? Because of what case?

To answer that question we have to go back

And hear the words that come directly before

They are simple words, and filled with power from God's Spirit

Listen in:

And all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for

'God opposes the proud,

but gives grace to the humble.'

Now here St Peter is quoting from the Old Testament

Proverbs 3:34, part of the wisdom tradition of God's people

But St Peter wasn't writing simply as a wise person

Handing on good advice

He was writing an *apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ*

As someone sent to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ

To encourage us to receive the gift of life with God

That starts right now, in this messy world

St Peter was writing as an *ambassador of the Lord*

As someone sent to encourage us to be reconciled to God

Through the forgiveness of sins that Jesus won for us

In this sermon we'll think about St Peter's teaching

By first going back to some teaching from Jesus

That reveals to us the mind of God on what it means, practically,

here and now, to live in a humble way

But that also reveals to us life in God's eternal kingdom

We'll then look at some of St Peter's teaching in 1 Peter

And consider how it helps us understand Jesus

Both what he has done for us, and who he is

I'll be proclaiming the Good News

That Christ is the One who lived a truly humble life

And who has been exalted by God

He is the one who lifts us up into a new way of life with God

Ok. First, let's hear some teaching of Jesus about humility

This is teaching that we read in Luke chapter 14

It's teaching that Jesus gave to powerful people

When he was invited to a banquet. Let's listen:

When [Jesus] noticed how the guests chose the places of honour, he told them a parable. 'When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honour, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, "Give this person your place", and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, "Friend, move up higher"; then you will be honoured in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.' Luke 14

Now at first glance Jesus' words give us practical wisdom: words to keep in mind

When we ourselves are invited to participate in a banquet

We shouldn't push ourselves forward

If we do this, we might be demoted by the host

And humiliated before all the guests

Instead we should choose the less exalted seats at the back corner

And so give the host the opportunity to bring us up

Notice that Jesus does not criticise the very human desire for approval

The very human desire to be honoured before others

It seems to me that Jesus affirms the reality

That to live well we *need* approval,

That we need to be honoured *in front of other human beings*

But notice the teaching that Jesus gives:

We do not receive real approval and honour by pushing ourselves forward

In fact this is a recipe for disgrace and humiliation

Rather we find true approval and honour by willingly taking on the lower place,
and letting others bring us forward

So: on the one hand here's teaching from Jesus

Wisdom for social occasions in the world

But notice also that Jesus' teaching is not introduced as *good advice*

But as a *parable*

Something deeper is going on here

There will be a divine banquet, an eternal feast

One hosted by the Lord himself

Our this-worldly need to receive approval and honour

At things like banquets is a clue to our deeper need

To receive approval and honour *from God*

And to receive this approval and honour

Not only in the presence of the human community

But in the presence of angels and archangels

And the whole company of heaven

And the path to approval and honour is humility

Now this takes us back to words of St Peter

Let's listen again to what he says:

And all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.

This teaching starts off in our relationships with each other

...clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings *with one another*

In fact, if you look at the context

St Peter has been talking about our relationships *especially in the church*

And especially between those who exercise authority

And those who are under authority

St Peter has warnings to those who exercise authority

That they should serve willingly, and not to feather their own nests

That they should be an example to those they serve

Perhaps we could say – as this is St Peter writing –

The one who objected to having his feet washed by Christ

The one who then three times denied even knowing Christ

That those who serve in authority in the church should set an example

Of being willing to admit their faults

Of being willing to be served by Christ

St Peter also has teaching for those under authority

That they should accept this Christ-centred authority

But St Peter is making a more fundamental point

That all of us, whatever position we are in

Should clothe ourselves in humility

That we should put on humility like putting on an apron

Readying ourselves to look to the needs of others

But what then of *our need* for approval, of our need for honour?

St Peter assures us, God's word assures us

That God sees us, that God knows us

And that God will honour us

St Peter says: **Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that *he* may exalt you in due time.**

He will exalt us, lift us up, honour us

In due time

At the right season, when everything is ripe

That he will honour us with the words

Well done, good and faithful servant

That is why here and now we can

Cast all your anxiety on [God], because he cares for [us].

He knows our needs, including our need for approval, for honour
We can come to God in prayer, he will trade our anxiety for his peace

In fact Jesus invites us to come to him in this way
To come to him with *our* anxieties, with *our* burdens
Including all the anxieties that we feel about our status in life
About our identity in this world
About whether there is any hope
Of finding approval of finding honour for ourselves: He invites us to come to him
Listen to the invitation that he gives: **'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'** Matthew 11
Our Lord Jesus shows that he is the true master
He is *the one* who is gentle, who is humble of heart
He is the one who can give us rest for our souls
Who can refresh us at the deepest level
By lifting us up into reconciliation, into fellowship
Into the approval and honour that only the Father can give

It is Jesus who is our hope
**who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.
Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.**

Come to Jesus, the one who humbled himself and became obedient
To the point of death, even death on a cross
And who was exalted by God: *Jesus* is the path of humility
He is the one raised up by God

Come to him, cast your anxiety on him, give your burdens to him
In him you will find the approval and honour of the Father
You will be raised up by God; you will find rest for your soul.