

22nd Sunday in Ordinary

Jeff Foxworthy is a comedian who made his mark by developing a “Redneck” list. He says, “You know you’re a Redneck if...”:

1. Directions to your house include, “Turn off the paved road.”
2. You have flowers planted in a commode in your front yard.
3. Your Dad walks you to school, ‘cause you’re both in the same grade.

You’ve got to be from the country to even laugh at those statements! In West Virginia, we aren’t rednecks, but we are country folks, and because Vienna is in a small city, I think of our church as a country church. I read a similar list the other day that said, “You know you go to a country church if...”

1. The church votes not to buy a chandelier because nobody knows how to play one.
2. The opening day of deer season is a church holiday.
3. Folks think the “Rapture” is what you get from lifting something too heavy.
4. The pastor asks “Bubba” to take up the offering and five guys and two women stand up!

If you understand the New Testament, you realize Jesus grew up in Galilee, which was considered the country. The followers of Jesus were labeled, “unlearned and ignorant men.”

The sophisticated city folks in Jerusalem looked down on Jesus and were constantly looking for an opportunity to embarrass Him.

One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being very carefully watched.

When He noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: “When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited **both** of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this person your seat.’

Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. **For everyone who exalts themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.**”

Notice, the brilliant way Jesus taught. He told a simple little parable of people sitting down at a wedding feast, and then He applied the spiritual principle.

Listen again to the spiritual principle, “**For everyone who exalts themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.**” This is one of the wonderful paradoxes of Jesus that is **totally** contrary to the way the world thinks.

The world says if you want to climb higher and be somebody you must push, fight, claw, and work your way to the top of the heap. The world says the way up is up!

But Jesus says just the opposite. He says the way up is down. In other words, if you try to promote your prideful self, you’ll end up humbled.

And He also says the way down is up. So, contrary to what the world is teaching you, the way up is down and the way down is up.

Pride is basically the attitude that says, “I’m the center of my universe.” As Jesus watched these Pharisees, He noticed they all jockeyed for position to sit in the best seats at the dinner.

As Jesus observed the maneuvering of these men, He detected the poison of pride in their lives. You see pride wasn’t just a problem back then, it’s still with us today. Let me mention two things that make pride such a problem.

First: It’s hard to recognize it in yourself.

Someone once said pride is the only disease that makes everyone sick except the one who has it. In the Catholic list of the seven deadly sins, pride used to be called **vanity**.

Those of you of my generation will remember the song by Carly Simon, “You’re So Vain.” It says...You’re so vain, you probably think this song is about you. Don’t you? Don’t you?

Some of you are so vain you probably think this sermon is about you, don’t you, don’t you? Well, if you don’t think it’s about you, it probably IS!

Pride is hard to see in ourselves, but we can easily see it in others. Another problem with pride is, that it leads to ruin.

The Bible says in Proverbs, “Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.” Jesus was saying the best way to guarantee you’ll fall is to let pride take over your life.

I read a funny story about a frog that wanted to go south with the birds for the winter. It was too far to hop and he couldn’t fly, so he thought about it and came up with a solution.

He got a couple of his bird friends to hold each end of a stick in their beaks and then the little frog clamped down on the center of the stick with his mouth.

The birds took off and the frog was hanging from the stick they were carrying in their mouths. They flew over a couple of farmers who observed the scene. One farmer said to the other, “What a brilliant idea! Whoever came up with that idea is a genius. I guess it was one of those birds who had the idea!” When the frog heard that he just couldn’t let the birds get the credit for his good idea, so he said, “I...I...I...” as he fell to the ground. The moral of that story is: If someone else gets the credit for your good idea, just keep your mouth closed!

In the Garden of Eden, Satan slithered up to Eve and said, “If you will eat that fruit, you will be like God.” That was a lie, but Eve swallowed it. People today are still swallowing Satan’s lie, that you don’t need God, you don’t need Jesus, just be your own God!

By eating the fruit, Eve thought she was moving up to a higher stage of consciousness, but it led to being kicked out of the beautiful, perfect environment of the Garden of Eden. **Why?** Because with God the way down is up and the way up is down. Pride always leads to ruin.

But now, let’s talk about: **THE HONOR OF HUMILITY**

You don’t find a lot of people who are asking the question, “How can I be more humble?” They are asking, “How can I succeed?” Or “How can I climb to the top of the heap?”

Go into a Barnes and Noble or a Books-A-Million Bookstore and ask to be directed to the section on “how to be more humble.”

They will look at you like you're from another planet. Yet the Bible speaks over and over about the **value** of humility. Humility is actually a wonderful honor. Let me share with you three characteristics of true humility so you can understand it better.

True humility is seeing myself as God sees me.

Humility is not having a poor self-image of thinking you are worthless. It's having an honest evaluation of who you are—as the Bible describes you. On one hand I am a sinner who deserves death and hell—yet I am a child of God.

Humility is found in the tension and the balance between those two realities.

Someone once said, “God has wisely designed the human body so that you can neither pat yourself on the back, nor kick yourself in the seat.”

Without Jesus we are nothing, but in Christ, we can do all things. That's humility. True humility is revealed by how I treat others.

Humility is not some kind of badge you wear. The only way to reveal your humility is if you treat others more highly than yourself. It's the old formula for joy, J.O.Y., which is Jesus first, Others second, and Yourself third.

It is pride that makes us want to rush to get the best seats at the table. It is pride that makes us rush to the front of the line so you can eat before anyone else. Pride keeps “I” at the center of the universe and it constantly is looking out for #1.

Humility has replaced “I” with “Christ.” And Jesus Christ was the most humble man who ever lived.

The Bible says, your attitude should be that of Christ who, being in His very nature, God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very form of a servant..." Jesus humbled Himself to step down from the throne of heaven to become one of us—a human being.

The night before Jesus was crucified, **all** of the disciples were too full of pride to perform the slave's job of washing feet.

Jesus humbled Himself and became as a servant. He took a towel and wrapped it around Him and went to the disciples and washed their dirty, dusty, stinking feet. He further humbled Himself and became obedient unto death—He died the death of a common criminal.

He kept going down, down, down until He died on a cross and was buried. And what did God do? The scripture says, "God highly exalted Him and gave Him a name that is above every other name." That's still the way it works.

The way down is up and the way up is down. May God teach us to humble ourselves and treat others with kindness and respect.

"For everyone who exalts themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." AMEN.