

February 4, 2018
Fifth Sunday After Pentecost

“Called to Humiliation”

1 Corinthians 9:16-27

In confirmation right now we are studying the two states of Jesus Christ, and no, one of these states is not Texas not matter how much Texans like to think so. No, these are Christ’s state of humiliation and His state of exultation.

Here humiliation does not mean embarrassed. It refers to Christ’s humility—His willingness to forgo His divine power and majesty and be made low for our benefit. It is outlined in the Second Article of the Apostle’s Creed.

From His unfathomable divine glory and power Jesus was “Conceived by the Holy Spirit”—made a single fertilized human egg cell growing in a woman’s womb, “born of the virgin Mary,” crying and soiling His diaper, growing as a boy into a man, then “suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.” That’s pretty low, but out of love for you, He did it all for you.

Then the state of exultation, where He fully manifests His divine power and glory—descending to Hell in the spirit to proclaim victory, rising from the dead, ascending to heaven, sitting at the Father’s right hand, and returning in all glory to judge the living and the dead.

Of all the miracles and acts of God in the Bible, I find the incarnation of Christ hands down the most amazing—that Almighty God, ruler and creator of all that is, would humble Himself into our human flesh and allow Himself to be maligned, abused, tortured and killed by the very rebellious people He created—so that they might be saved—is mind boggling.

But now Jesus Christ is our glorious exalted king and savior. And how do we follow His example? Why, we strive to be exalted also! Right? Am I wrong about this?

Seriously, if you try real hard to step outside of yourself and take a look at your life through the eyes of the world around you, honestly, would folks see you more attempting a state of humiliation, or one of exultation? Let’s face it, among us Christians in these United States you’d be hard-pressed to find one who, when wronged, isn’t real quick to stand up and say, “You can’t do that. I’ve got rights!”

Think about your life in this and any other congregations. Are people quick to take offense? Are people quick to seek retribution? Do folks have long memories when it comes to their being wronged in some way? Are they slow in releasing grudges? Are they unwilling to allow a slight to pass? If they do, do they really let it pass, or are they sharing their offense with others in whispers over the after-service coffee?

Now instead of thinking about them, think about you. Are you guilty of this same behavior that holds one’s self as high up, exalted and worthy of better treatment? Yeah, me too. It’s hard not to. We’re inculcated with our national value of individual human rights. Our legal system is all about protecting our individual rights. Individual hard work and achievement is our ideal. Self exultation toward success and prosperity is our norm. Actually, for Americans, it’s kind of weird if we don’t pursue this.

But in Christ we have a higher calling. And while we are not all called to be apostles like St. Paul or evangelists and preachers, we are called to be Christian to others, and that is really what St. Paul is describing. *“For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I*

might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.”

For the sake of others we need to practice exercising a state of humiliation—a willingness to make less of ourselves for the sake of those around us. We need to be maintaining a kind of excessive generosity of character, allowing ourselves to be inconvenienced, maybe even taken advantage of, if we sense an opportunity to serve Christ by serving another person.

Lest I am misunderstood, I am not saying we don't do our best, try to succeed and to better our personal situation. I'm not saying we don't enforce our rights as a citizen and person. What I'm saying is that if the situation calls for it, we should be willing and even eager not to exercise those rights and standings because someone simply needs us to be less.

Quick example. If you're introverted maybe it doesn't apply, but a lot of us, when we get in a conversation, want to be the one talking...and generally talking about ourselves, our experiences, what we know. Sometimes, just be quiet. Just be quiet and listen because that's what somebody else needs. It won't build you up. It might even bore you to tears. But you do it for the other's sake.

Another one. Someone is kind of a jerk to you. Whatever the situation, your adrenaline shoot up, your breathing quickens and you think, “What a jerk!” You don't have to react in anger and you really don't have to talk to anybody and everybody you meet about it. Maybe what you need to do, for their sake, is just let them be a jerk for a while. I mean, have you ever been a jerk to somebody? There probably was an underlying reason. Maybe you just need to gracefully let them unload and maybe, just maybe, when their done, they'll realize they've been jerk. Then, instead of having a conflict, you'll have an opportunity to share love and comfort.

Why? Why should you forgo your rights, your standing? Because it has been done for you!

Christ, in your human skin, lived an entire life in humiliation...by choice...for you...even though you're often a jerk toward Him. Christ, infinitely your superior in every respect—glory, power, majesty, intelligence—made Himself low, the lowest for you not because you deserved it, but because you needed it. He became the eternal curse of all your sin nailed to a tree to die...for you.

This is not easy. Our culture and our very fallen nature works against it. This is why Paul describes it as running a race and exercising self-control. It's something we have to work at, practice and intentionally carry out. So make a point to try.

As you are baptized into Christ, emulate Christ. Follow His example. Don't exalt yourself. That's aspiring to God's place, and that's really the core of our whole sin problem. Follow of the example of Christ in human flesh for you, serving you, healing you, becoming less and less unto death for you.

By God's grace you can be less, knowing that Christ your king is exalted in glory and, following in faith through this life in His humility, you one day will share in the prize, His glory.