

November 16, 2025

Twenty-third Sunday After Pentecost

“Evil Arrogance”

Malachi 4:1-6

Continual arrogance is a very off-putting characteristic in a human being. Thankfully, while just about everyone might have a moment of arrogance now and again, I can't say I've run into a whole lot of people to whom I would attribute arrogance as a constant character trait. But there have been a few.

Those few exaggerate their own self-importance in every situation as if the world revolves around them. They're dismissive of the opinions of others and expect deference from everyone and can be quite nasty if they don't receive it. They're fools, living in a reality that everyone sees except for them; the reality that they're nothing special, just living under the mistaken pretense of superiority. That said, while annoying, I don't think we'd call an arrogant person evil. In fact, we're rather tolerant of a little arrogance, both in others and in ourselves. But God does indeed, through His prophet Malachi, call arrogance evil.

“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.”

The duality of “the arrogant and all evildoers” here makes them one in the same, suffering the same condemnation. That seems a bit harsh to us. Arrogance is unseemly, but we don't explicitly see it forbidden in the Ten Commandments. Arrogance doesn't appear in the various lists of sins in the Gospels and epistles. Why is it counted as equal to evil?

Well, arrogance among more or less equals is one thing, arrogance before God is another thing entirely. If you read the entire oracle of Malachi, it's quite obvious the Levites, priests and Jews are arrogantly disputing with God, arguing that they're doing nothing wrong and that they deserve better from God. They are arrogant. And mind you, this takes place about 100 years after the Jews had returned to rebuild Jerusalem following the Babylonian captivity. They should know better than to mess with Yahweh, they should know that He is the God of their deliverance and humble themselves to His will and to His blessing, but they can't seem to help themselves. They count themselves as God's chosen race and thus deserve God's deference. They're indeed arrogant.

But this is not one of those cases where we look upon faithless ancient Israel and shake our heads. We look at them and if we are wise we say, “There, but for the grace of God, go I.” Christians can be pretty arrogant.

We can be so to our fellow humans without a doubt. Look at the way we sometimes regard atheists, Muslims, Mormons, Scientologists...even those of other Christian denominations. We Lutheran Christians know we've got the one true God and His Word down rightly, but we easily fall into thinking that makes us rank above those who don't. We do the same thing a lot when it comes to those in our community, looking down upon those who've made bad decisions and it shows in where they've ended up in life. It is kind of arrogant for us to think “They deserve it” as if we deserve better because, well, we are better.

But we get arrogant toward God also. We don't dare do so openly. But over and over again God's Word calls on us to humble ourselves before others but we say, “No! That's beneath me. I deserve better.” We're arrogant. We think we have standing. God calls on us to forgive in all circumstances, yet we'll insist, “He or she must apologize, ask my forgiveness, maybe even

do some penance before I forgive. They owe me that.” Sin is sin and we know it. Yet we’ll claim we have a good reason to justify it. That’s like looking at a judge and saying, “But I’m above the law.” Talk about arrogance.

And the topper of them all: idolatry. “Sorry Almighty God. Allow me to set you aside in favor of...” wealth, carnal pleasure, career, leisure, family, a political view, my peer group, celebrity, pick your false god. “Almighty God of creation, you have to take a back seat to what I want.” Talk about arrogance.

And then when this rebellious life in a broken world realizes the consequences of sin in affliction, hardship, decay toward inevitable death, we’ll often accuse God of doing us wrong, as if He is required to obey our self-serving design rather than us His perfect design. Arrogance. Now you see why arrogance is equal to evil. It just is.

And the worst thing about our arrogance which demands that Almighty God have some special regard for us human beings, His creation? It completely forgets that has most surely already has!

The Gospel is very simply that the Father gave His only-begotten Son to redeem us from the curse of sin unto perfect and everlasting life. Sinful arrogance exalts and exaggerates one’s worth or importance. God, being the Almighty and Glorious God above all things, is singularly of greatest importance and worth. Yet He humbles Himself into our humanity in Christ. Though God, Jesus is never arrogant. Always lowly, serving, loving and then suffering, bleeding, dying, for our sake.

My goodness, how ashamed we should be that we demand any deference from Him, demand He regard us according to our terms and desires after what He has done for us. When we look in the mirror and examine the audacity we have before God in our sins, we need to see Jesus there staring back at us and know the truth; our arrogance is in being an evildoer, deserving our Lord’s rejection and condemnation.

Yet in that same moment of shame there is contrition, repentance, and the realization that the Christ staring at us still is without arrogance. Above and beyond us in divine majesty, He does not in righteous wrath crush us as rebels beneath Him as we are. He forgives us. And what’s more He receives us into Himself; His glory into which He has baptized us. He makes us sons and daughters of the Father, brothers and sisters to Himself. He has every right to be arrogant, yet instead He is nothing but steadfast love.

“But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.”

Much ink has been spent discussing how one rightly fears God’s name. I’m sure a valuable part of that comes from recognizing how arrogant we are before Him and seeing how evil that really is. Arrogance before God is akin to standing at the foot of the cross, staring up at Christ dying in agony to win your salvation, and saying, “But I really need you to do more.”

Steadfast love is Christ hanging there, seeing you be this way and saying, “Father, forgive them, they don’t know what they’re doing.”

See your arrogant error again, again, and again for the evil it truly is. See the cross, and in shame and fear repent. Then humbly receive the glory of that cross, the forgiveness of sins. Know that the Son of righteousness has risen upon you with perfect healing in His wings. Then go forth and try to live each day to His glory, guarding against the arrogance that has no place in you, a beloved and redeemed child of His grace and steadfast love.

Amen.

