



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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September 5, 2010
15th Sunday after Pentecost
Sermon Text: [Luke 14:1, 7-14](#)
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Proverbs 25:6, 7](#)
Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 119a](#)
Second Lesson: [James 2:1-13](#)

Follow Christ in Self-Denial

In genuine humility
In unselfish love

Just a second...I have to update my status on Facebook. Standing in pulpit...about to preach. I don't have a Facebook page, but I've spent some time on it. I've seen many more inane things than that on Facebook as people update their statuses. These social networks, Facebook and Twitter, I think they appeal to something in us in our society that really is the common man's way to self promote, isn't it? As though people really care where I'm standing or what I'm doing right now. But in a certain way, doesn't it make you feel a little more important that you think somebody wants to know that you had hamburger for lunch on the first day of school or whatever the case may be. It's a little bit about self promotion.

Didn't Chad Ochocinco get fined \$25,000 by the NFL because he tweeted during a football game while he was supposed to be working? He thought it was just as important to promote himself by tweeting.

Self promotion is the exact opposite of self denial that Jesus is talking about in our text. That's why I think the words that I read to you are just foreign to the ears of many people in our society. As you and I live in this society, we can become affected by this way of thinking. It's not like all Facebook is bad or all Twitter is bad or anything like that, but you can easily get sucked into "everybody look at me" kind of thinking, can't you?

What does Jesus say here? "Follow me in self denial" is how I think you would sum up everything I just read to you. Deny yourself in genuine humility. Don't put on a false front to get something out of someone. You know, like how you know the kids want something when they come up and offer to help you do something, or they take out the garbage without being asked, or they want to do the dishes or say "Is there anything I can do to help you out?" You finally stop and say "What do you need? What do you want? Let's just get it over with." Genuine humility is what he is talking about...not humility that is a put on.

What brought about this lesson not to exalt yourself and instead to humble yourself was that Jesus had been invited by a pharisee to come to his house for a meal. He was on his way to Jerusalem for the last time. He had gone to Perea. Some pharisees had come and told him that Herod, who was also the ruler of Perea as well as Galilee, was

looking to kill him. Whether that was true or not, I don't know, but it seems like they wanted him to get to Jerusalem sooner so they could kill him. He then accepted this invitation and they were watching him closely. They wanted to trip him up. He knew this. In the verses that I didn't read to you from Chapter 14, he healed someone who was sick on the Sabbath and said, "Hey, what do you guys think? Is it lawful to heal someone on the Sabbath or not...this man who was born sick?" He went ahead and healed him and said, "If your ox falls into a hole, you are going to get him out on the Sabbath. Shouldn't we have that much mercy on someone who is sick like this?"

Then as they are getting their seats, he notices how they are kind of elbowing each other to get to the place of honor, kind of like James and John... "Can we have the seats to your right and to your left in your kingdom?" In whatever way, shape or form, there was seating that conveyed rank or importance or most honored guest, next most honored guest, and peon that I guess I had to invite because he is my brother's cousin. I don't know how it went exactly, but it's something like that. Jesus talks about it in other places in the Gospels...how they would fight to get the place of honor. He sees this going on. He is watching them while they were also trying to watch him and trip him up. So he decides to teach and show them their desperate need for a savior by seeing their sin. He uses the simple parable that's easy to understand...don't think more of yourself than you ought to and take the most prominent seat because then when someone more prominent than you comes, you are going to look like the fool when you are told to go look some place else. Instead he says, "Just take a seat where you find it. Take the lowest seat and if he tells you to move up, great. That's fine. You're at the banquet. What's the difference?"

That's not how we at times want to act. We want to exalt ourselves. We want to lift ourselves up, which is literally what exalt means, and praise ourselves. We want others to praise us. We want others to look up to us. For you and me today, this temptation might not come to lift ourselves up in our eyes or in the eyes of others by where we are going to sit at a meal. But have you ever offered some kind of service to the Lord and to his people and then get kind of put out that no one thanks you or no one notices? Why is that? Isn't it because your sinful nature and my sinful nature wants people to notice us and thank us and pat us on the back? It might not be our only motivation, but there's that sinful part of us that looks for us. When someone else is acknowledged and we aren't, we can get downright ornery. That's a way of exalting ourselves instead of humbling ourselves.

Think about it...we have every reason to humble ourselves, every reason to go against the flow of society because as Christians, where the name literally means "little Christ," we are to be in the world but not of the world. We are to imitate Christ. If you look at Philippians 2 when there were some people bickering back and forth in Philippi and thinking of themselves more than they ought to, Paul said to them, "*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very*

nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:5-8.)

Jesus humbled himself...not because he needed you and me in heaven, not because heaven would be any less perfect without any of his fallen ranks. He humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on the cross, because that's what he is. As true God, he puts the interest of others ahead of himself. As you and I live in a society where that is less and less lauded or looked up to, we have to watch the temptation to think more of ourselves than we ought to. We have to watch the temptation to self promote instead of self denial. We have to watch ourselves and take note when we start getting full of ourselves in different areas of our lives and then say, "Lord, forgive me. It should be all about you and living to thank you. Instead, I'm making it all about me again. Forgive me Lord because I have sinned."

It's not easy. It's not what we see. As you look around in the world you think, "People that do that, they don't get ahead. You have to step on people to get ahead. You have to exalt yourself. You don't humble yourself to get ahead." God told us, "Follow me. Live to thank me. Do what I tell you to do. Don't do what the world is doing or even what looks like works in the world." He says, "In reality, you've already got your reward. I've forgiven all your sins. I've taken away all the times that you've exalted yourself. I've washed your sins in the blood of Christ and you are as white as snow. You are forgiven and heaven is open to you. You will receive your reward in the resurrection of righteousness." The reward of grace, the reward he has already given us that is simply waiting for us when we rise to eternal life.

So maybe instead of looking at our own belly buttons, we need to look at heaven more often and live as aliens and strangers and live in more genuine humility. Stop thinking it has to be all about us or all about our kids or all about what we want, and recognize instead that it's all about God because he's the one that took away our sins.

Jesus went on to make another point about self denial as opposed to self promotion. Being selfish, you do something for someone else simply because you want to get something back. If you are going to have a dinner, you invite those that are going to invite you back. Then the only reason you are doing it isn't to be loving or kind, it isn't to imitate the love of God. Then it's to get something for yourself, and that really is selfish. It's not Christ-like love. He says, "Invite those who won't repay you." It isn't saying it's ever wrong to invite someone that is going to invite you back. That's just fine, but watch your motives. That's what he's telling us. Don't do things simply for selfish gain. Do things in unselfish love.

Love and serve those who may not even be able to love and serve you back. What I think that means for you and me is interesting to think about. We'd say, "We don't do stuff like that." Consider this. I remember a woman in Minnesota who when we were having a presentation talking about our offerings and things like that, she pulled me aside afterwards and said, "God says charity begins at home, so I only give to the home

church. I don't give anything to missions." There were so many places to start with that statement, it's kind of hard to pick. God didn't say charity begins at home. That's a folk saying. It's not in Scripture. But I chose to start with "If you are going to say charity begins at home, by your very statement, that means it continues to go other places. You're telling me your charity ends at home, stays at home, starts, middles and ends at home and goes nowhere beyond you."

Can we at times be selfish with our offerings that are given to the Lord? Can we maybe want them to go where we can see their benefit, where we can see what they accomplish, where we can have the benefit of them? Isn't that exactly what Jesus would be talking about here? Isn't it amazing that when there is a building project, money always comes in faster because people can see what is going on? But given just out of love for God to carry out the ministry God has entrusted to us, that's a little slower. And it's even slower when it's to go some place where we'll never benefit from it, where it's going to benefit someone else or train someone else's pastor or reach out with the Gospel some place else. Why would we want to give money to the Lord that goes some place beyond us? I guess God tells us because he wants us to love like he loves.

Think about it...Jesus lived and died for every last person that ever has lived or breathed or every person that ever will live or breath, right? Doesn't that include an awful lot of people that want nothing to do with him? Didn't he love perfectly even those people who rejected him? He didn't love them any less and he continues to send the sun on them and the rain and gives them the blessing of living in this world even though they have rejected him. So perfect and absolute is his unselfish love. And as a "little Christ," we are called to imitate Christ, to be a little Christ to our neighbor...to love unselfishly, not just for something we are going to get out of it or not just something that our school children will get out of it. We are to love completely and at all times and in all ways. I think if we ask ourselves, do we at times practice selfish love? The answer is obviously, yes. We are sinful.

The only answer to our sin is the love God has shown us in Christ. The closer we get to that, the more we immerse ourselves in his love and his forgiveness, the more we will want to and the more we will love unselfishly without an expectation of return. If God grants us the return of his grace and his favor through the people that we love, so be it. But if he doesn't or they don't notice our work, so be it. We have the satisfaction of knowing that we are living to honor the one who lived and died to love us first.