

WELCOME 25 February 2018 2 Lent '18 B

Mark 8:27-38 & Isaiah 53:2-12

Good morning! Welcome to worship today! It is great to have you here this morning. Please stay for morning tea after worship so we can get a chance to know one another better...

The ancient Greeks called it *hubris* - *hju:bris* – we use the word pride. For the Greeks it was full-throated defiance. It's the fist shaken in the face of human or divine companion declaring "I Know Best"

Hubris was always an element of the great Greek dramas...but never the comedies, always & only the tragedies. Why? Because hubris always ends with a broken heart...with pain & tears. Scripture agrees saying, *Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. Pr 16:13*

We think of pride as the over-inflated sense of self-importance (Muhammad Ali's I am the greatest) but it is also & maybe more common today as that self-disparaging self-devaluing self-pitying "I am worthless & no one gets how tough it is to be me."

In either case behind it all you hear "I Know Best." Hubris/pride always sees self as the ultimate decider – the final authority – the center of all influence & insight & most importantly attention. Look at me...But Jesus comes to put pride to death.

"If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, & follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake & for the sake of the Good News, you will save it."

Jesus comes in humility. Jesus empties himself of privilege & position to take the way of sacrifice & self-giving love. That love without restraint & without condition also leads to his death & resurrection by which we in our pride are killed & then brought to life in him in whom we live now & forever.

God has promised: *I will give them an undivided heart & put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Ez 11:19*

Through Jesus Christ & the power of his Holy Spirit within you, God keeps that promise so that your life reflects his humble love & the overflow of joy that is found in life lived for Jesus' sake & the sake of his kingdom of love & life without end.

LWKids is ON! Leonie & Judi will lead our youngest disciples out to the verandah during the next song medley.

If you'd like to be part of that team leading our kids...see me today!

2 Lent '18 B – CREATE IN ME A CLEAN HEART: HEARTBROKEN BY PRIDE

FAITH CHAT: Last week we discovered that none of us are “giving up” anything for Lent. With that in mind...

1. What is one thing you would hate to have to give up?
2. When Jesus says “take up your cross,” what does he mean?

I'm not a big Olympics fan, so I haven't watched much of the action over the last fortnight...but I was stunned to read several on-line articles similar to this one: Olympics should be reserved for the best athletes, not _____. That particular writer took exception to a female competitor who failed to excite during her 1st round performance & of course didn't make to the next round. He actually named & tried to shame her participation in the Olympics because she didn't perform up to what he thought was the lowest standard for her event. But he wasn't alone. There were several sports journalists who blasted snow-deprived countries for sending athletes to the “winter” games only to finish dead last...116th out of 116 or 47th out of 47 competitors.

I had to laugh because I remember back in the days before participation ribbons; I actually won my first two heats in the hurdles in my primary school's athletics carnival. But in the finals I had to run against the 4 fastest kids in my school. So the 5 of us lined up & the gun sounded & I finished so far behind the other 4 I think I came in 6th.

But what struck me was here were writers who may never have strapped on skis & plummeted downhill @ 100kmh or buckled themselves onto a snowboard & done some of those amazing death-defying tricks in the half-pipe presuming they know who should be competing in the Games. In any competition, somebody has to finish last.

In all their spilled bits & bytes of their columns it was obvious: you could hear them saying: “I Know Best”. Hubris/Pride – that disease of the human heart that presents itself in different forms & to differing degrees & is obvious to everyone but the person who has it. Yet the truth is, pride infects us all. The issue is not “Does pride exist in your heart?” but “Where is it & how it is being expressed in your life?”

Jesus saw this every day of his ministry. We remember the challenges thrown his way. “Why does he keep company & eat with such shady characters?” “Who does he think he is forgiving sin?” “He constantly breaks the Sabbath.” “He talks like he's God.” There were certainly others but the idea was always the same...the religious experts & spiritual bigwigs were certain they knew best. They knew what prophets were supposed to do. They knew what God's Messiah was supposed to be like. They knew what God's mind was on any & every subject. Ask 'em. They'll tell ya'.

In fact...that's the whole crux of the account we heard earlier...BIBLES...Jesus begins to show his disciples the true nature/purpose/direction of his life...Acknowledges his Messiah-ship contrary to all the wild guesses of others. He then, for the 1st time according to Mark, lays out clearly what his being God's Anointed/Messiah will entail

Jesus tells his followers for the 1st time that his journey will involve rejection, suffering, dying, & rising again...he probably told them it was going to get ugly & for them too. *“As he talked about this openly with his disciples...”* I bet he was pretty explicit...when Peter pulls him aside...NO! Jesus not you! Not like that! We have to understand: Peter loves Jesus. Jesus is the best friend Peter's ever had & he loves this unusual friend who called him away from his fishing & into a life of adventure, excitement, & risk. Peter doesn't want to give that up. Peter doesn't want to lose that under any circumstance Peter loves being a disciple. He loves listening & learning & travelling... the authority & power Jesus manifests. Peter's intrigued by the miracles & debates with the religious big-wigs & parables/healings/exorcisms. Peter wants that to go on. He doesn't yet understand all of it...but he does not want to lose it for any reason. He doesn't want the enormous cost Jesus describes...so out of his love for Jesus he rebukes Jesus... an aside...

“Reprimand” is a lousy translation here...the word is “rebuke”. Peter “rebukes” Jesus for entertaining the idea that he's going to suffer/die. In Mark we find the word “rebuke” in 2 situations. 1 – when Jesus rebukes demons & casts them out. 2 – right here when Peter speaks in the harshest tone to Jesus & Jesus replies in kind with the language he reserves for the forces of evil & anyone who stands between him & his mission to save. He will rebuke the disciples for keeping children at bay...

Peter's pride puts him in a place where he is content with things as they are & in his mind as they are is best...Christian writer John Stott describes this condition in Christians as when we wear a “decent, but thin, veneer of Christianity...somewhat involved; enough to be respectable but not enough to be uncomfortable...religion that is a great, soft cushion.” Except that's not what Jesus has on offer...All Jesus can give us is a cross...his own & our own...& that cross is what real love looks like.

Jesus' even stronger rebuke of Peter is anchored in an even deeper love: the love of God for a broken world...the love of God who wants the world, all of it, back...the love of God who is not ashamed to give up his Son to die to reclaim you/me as his own...to forgive us/restore us to our place as his children.

When that cross happens **for** us...it must also happen **to** us...in the same breath when Jesus says *“the Son of Man must suffer”*, he also says...*“If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, (deny yourself) take up your cross, & follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake & for the sake of the Good News, you will save it.”*

C. S. Lewis says, "Christ says: give me all. I don't want only so much of your time or money or work, I want you. No half-measures are good enough. Hand over the whole self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked--the whole outfit. And I will give you a new self instead."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: "When Christ calls a man he calls him to come & die"

Jesus comes in humility. Jesus empties himself of privilege & position to take the way of sacrifice & self-giving love. That love without restraint & without condition also leads to his death & resurrection by which we in our pride are killed & then brought to life in him in whom we live now & forever.

Pride is a particularly dangerous sin - where other sins lead us further from God, pride attempts to elevate us above God. Pride says to God, "I know best...not you." John Stott also wrote: Pride is more than the first of the seven deadly sins; it is itself the essence of all sin...pride is the greatest enemy & humility our greatest friend.. Pride says it's up to me to determine my worth my value & yours. Pride is in large part that critical spirit that evaluates you by your functional value to me...finds fault in the small things in you ignoring the large things in me...that attaches great significance to how things seem/look/appear but ignores the greater matters that exist below the surface...is defensive to critique but at the same time is despondent in failure & dwells on & excuses & blames with an inability to laugh at my mistakes or see things from the perspective of someone else. Pride says to God, "I know best...not you." It's that...that Jesus rebukes. "*You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God's.*"

And Jesus' question to the crowds stops me every time: *And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul?* What do I gain if I live completely through my own eyes, solely for my own purposes, according to only my own design & desire, measured only according to my own standard...What do I win if I live fully for me but lose it all in that day when everything of this earth is taken from me?

Jesus comes in humility. Jesus empties himself of privilege & position to take the way of sacrifice & self-giving love. That love without restraint & without condition also leads to his death & resurrection by which we in our pride are killed & then brought to life in him in whom we live now & forever. That is good news because your worth & your value will never be measured by what you do or achieve or by your biggest failure; but only by what Christ has done for you. It's that simple.

Jesus surrendered his life so you would have life.

Jesus became dis-grace so you would receive his grace.

Jesus humbled himself so you would receive the greatest honour. Child of God. Inheritor of God's Kingdom. Heir of all heaven's blessing.

Peter rebuked & ultimately reclaimed by Jesus was transformed by Christ's humility & grace because he would soon write to the church: *1 Peter 5:5-7 - In the same way, you who are younger must accept the authority of the elders. And all of you, dress yourselves in humility as you relate to one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, & at the right time he will lift you up in honour. Give all your worries & cares to God, for he cares about you. Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.*

Humility celebrates that God gets all the credit for choosing us so that we boast only in him. Humility celebrates that everything we have is a free gift from God, & trusts in hopeful expectation that the Father governs every breath, every heartbeat & every outcome...joyful or painful...and his abundance is for us.

Humility celebrates that Christ died for our sins. That's how sinful I was. That's how dependent I am.

Humility gives itself away in serving, rather than seeking to be served.

Humility bears the name of Christ to the world...boldly, confidently joyfully so that all might experience the life & grace & love & honour found only in the cross.

Let's pray for his cross to again be ours today...**Lord Jesus put to death in me that which claims its own way instead of yours. Put to death in me my self-absorption and open me to the needs of those nearby. Let your life and strength fill my every breath, power my every heartbeat, and guide my every thought, word and deed until you receive glory and praise and the world worships you as Lord. In your Name I pray... Amen.**