

February 28, 2016

I Have Sinned: Arrogance

Mark 9:30-37

Opening words: In 1846, former president of the United States John Quincy Adams suffered a stroke. A year later he returned to Congress, and his health was clearly failing. History tells us that Daniel Webster met Adams near the end of his life and inquired about his health. Always negative, Adams responded, *I inhabit a weak, frail, decayed tenement and the landlord does not intend to repair.*” Can I ask you a question?

How is your health? I don’t mean your physical health. I mean your spiritual health. Lent is a time to conduct a spiritual self-examination. I would guarantee you that one of the reasons you are not growing spiritually is today’s topic, arrogance. Do you consider yourself an arrogant person? Do the people in your life consider you an arrogant person? This is the hardest question. Does God consider you an arrogant person? This is message number seven in my eleven-part Lenten sermon series, *I Have Sinned*. Our Gospel reading for today is Mark 9:30-37.

Mark 9:30-37 ³⁰ They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, ³¹ because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.” ³² But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

³³ They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the road?” ³⁴ But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.

³⁵ Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.”

³⁶ He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷ “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”

John C. Maxwell (born 1947) is an American author, speaker and pastor. He has written many books. His primary topic is leadership. He once said, *“There are two kinds of pride, both good and bad. ‘Good pride’ represents our dignity and self-respect. ‘Bad pride’ is the deadly sin of superiority that reeks of conceit and arrogance.”* How many people do you know who have ‘bad pride?’ If you can think of one person, say, **“Amen!”**

We find ourselves this morning in the ninth chapter of Mark. It is one of those stories that makes you wonder about the disciples. I don’t know if the disciples didn’t hear Jesus, or didn’t want to hear Jesus. Regardless, they didn’t get the point. According to the text, Jesus and the disciples are alone. The Master takes this opportunity to teach them some difficult things. Jesus said it clearly, “One of you is going to betray me”.

Each one of us knows Judas betrayed Jesus. His betrayal led to his death. Through the eyes of the world, there can be no happy ending; Jesus is going to die. Yet, with God all things are possible. Long before Easter morning, Jesus tells the twelve he is going to be resurrected. It is the greatest miracle in the history of the world. Jesus made the point clearly, yet the disciples didn't get the point. I do not know if they didn't hear Jesus or didn't understand Jesus. I believe, they didn't want to hear Jesus. Regardless, the Master's words fell on deaf ears. It is safe to say the disciples had a different agenda than Jesus. Jesus came to serve, not to be served. Jesus came to establish the Kingdom of God, not an earthly kingdom. The disciples wanted just the opposite. They wanted to be served, because they wanted to serve in an earthly political kingdom. You can say the disciples were ambitious. Or, you can say they had a calculating heart. I believe, they were calculating or arrogant. Their true desires were revealed a short time later. They were on their way to Capernaum. As they walked, they talked. What is the subject? Who will sit at the right and the left of Jesus. In other words, they were debating who was going to hold the most power in Jesus's earthly administration. They missed the point. Jesus didn't come to establish an earthly kingdom. Jesus came to be the bridge between the world and God. Jesus thought in terms of the betterment of mankind; they thought in terms of self-promotion. They really weren't concerned about others. It is hard to say, but the disciples were arrogant. We understand arrogance because our world is filled with the arrogant.

The other night, I was struggling with this message, so I googled the most arrogant people in the world. You can find anything on-line. I came up with two lists: a list of celebrities and a list of nations. There were several sites that had the same lists. These came from a website called the "top tens". This is the list of most arrogant celebrities—I will give the top five to you in reverse order:

5. Charlie Sheen
4. Alec Baldwin
3. Lindsay Lohan
2. Kim Kardashian
1. Kanye West

I was surprised that Justin Bieber wasn't on the list. He came in at number eleven. However, he was number one on the list of annoying celebrities. (It pains me to say it, but John Wayne, "The Duke," is number six.)

What are the most arrogant countries in the world? Once again, I will give them to you in reverse order:

5. South Korea
4. Israel
3. Italy
2. India
1. United States

Ok, I will tell you. Great Britain was number six and Russia was number seven. Just think about that for a moment. Kanye West and the United States of America have this sad thing in common. We are both viewed by the world as the most arrogant. We are

the Kanye West of the world. Could it be our national pride has turned into our national arrogance? Webster defines arrogance as "offensive displays of superiority". If you are a little uncomfortable with our international ranking, say, "**Amen!**" I know, I am.

Our generation is not the first to struggle with arrogance. History is filled with arrogant characters. Jesus was born under the rule of one of the most arrogant men in history, Herod the Great. Do you know his story? Insecure and paranoid, he thought the entire world was after his throne. For this reason, he never trusted anyone, including his own family. Everyone said and everyone knew, it was better to be Herod's dog than it was to be Herod's son. He hated everyone and in return everyone hated him. Herod the Great knew that everyone hated him, to the point that he feared that people would celebrate at his death. How would that look? He wanted to fool history, so he gave a sinister order. He ordered that on the day of his death, three hundred innocent lives should be taken. He hoped the loved ones of the three hundred would mourn openly, tricking the world into thinking they were grieving for him. I am glad to report, that order was never executed. Listen to the next line. Arrogance fools itself into thinking it is attractive, but it is not.

Through the eyes of God, there is nothing uglier than arrogance. The reason is obvious. Arrogance removes us from the world. It is true of individual Christians and it is true of congregations. Just think about it. Christians and churches are designed to be part of the world. We are supposed to change the world for the better. We can't change the world if we are not part of the world. By definition, arrogance removes us from the world. History also tells us horrible things happen when the church removes itself from the world. The church has always been and always will be the conscience of society.

One of my favorite places in the world is Washington DC. Kathryn and I used to visit our national capitol annually with international students. We visited all the usual sites: Arlington National Cemetery, the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial and the rest. We also visited the Holocaust Museum. It is a horrible place because it reminds us of a horrible piece of history. I would encourage you to go; it will do you good. To be honest, it is not entertaining; it is challenging. It makes you question how a small group of people controlled so many. It sounds impossible, but the Nazi party tried to eliminate an entire race of people. History tells us no one tried to stop them, until it was too late. I find that to be disturbing. Martin Niemoeller (1892-1984) was a Protestant pastor in Germany, who protested against Hitler. For his efforts, he spent the last seven years of Nazi rule in a concentration camp. Perhaps he said it best:

"First they came for the Communists, and I
didn't object – for I wasn't a Communist;
Then they came for the Socialists, and I
didn't object – for I wasn't a Socialist;
Then they came for the labor leaders, and I
didn't object – For I wasn't a labor leader;
Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't
object – For I wasn't a Jew;

Then they came for me –
And there was no one left to object.

As I have walked through those dark halls of the Holocaust Museum, I have wondered why so many remained silent. They had to know something. You can make the case the people were afraid. Fear is a motivator. As I wrote this message, I looked at it from a different perspective. I wondered why the Church itself remained silent. Where was the Church? They must have known something. You can make a case they were afraid. Fear is a great factor. Or you can say the Church looked away because it forgot its original purpose. The Church had grown arrogant. Arrogance removes us from the world and human need. Let me ask you one more frightening question. Could the same thing happen today? Is the Church so removed from the world that we have forgotten our original purpose? The church is designed to be in the world, addressing human need. There is no room for arrogance in God's church. If all that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"**

Today is the Third Sunday of Lent. That means that in just four weeks, it will be Easter. Lent is approximately half over. What is Lent? It is a manmade liturgical season for those who are serious about their faith. It is a time of prayer, penance, repentance, atonement and self-denial. It is the perfect time to give yourself a spiritual examination. This is a painfully important question: How much arrogance do you find in yourself? How involved are you with the needy in this world? An arrogant church will surely die. In the scripture lesson for today, are you more like the arrogant disciples? Are you more like the humbled Savior?

There is a famous story about a group in Pass Christian, Mississippi, who decided to hold a hurricane party. What is a hurricane party? It is a party that is held during a hurricane. The guests of that party believed they would be safe as Hurricane Camille approached. The local police were sent out to warn the partiers of the danger, but the partiers didn't take the warning seriously. One person looked at the officer with a drink in his hand and said, "This is my land. If you want me to leave, then you are going to have to arrest me." No one was arrested that night but the officer did write down everyone's name. He told them he wanted to notify their family in case of their death. One by one the laughing partiers gave the officer their names. To them, it was a big joke, nothing was going to happen. At about 10:00 that evening something did happen. Hurricane Camille came ashore. The heart of that storm was Pass Christian, Mississippi. The news reported that twenty people had been killed by the storm while attending a hurricane party. Their families had been notified.

Can I ask you a question? What killed those partiers? Was it the 205 mile an hour winds of Hurricane Camille? Was it their own arrogance? Spiritually speaking, our arrogance is killing us. Churches by design are supposed to be part of the world, not above it. What is frustrating your spiritual development? Could it be your arrogance? You are a disciple of Jesus Christ. That means you are supposed to be a little more like Jesus every day. Jesus didn't have an arrogant bone in his body. And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**