

The Fifteenth Sunday of Pentecost

August 28, 2016

Prayer of the Day: O Lord Jesus Christ, preserve the congregation of believers with your never-failing mercy. Help us avoid whatever is wicked and harmful, and guide us in the way that leads to our salvation; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Proverbs 25:6-7

⁶ Do not exalt yourself in the king's presence,
and do not claim a place among great men;
⁷ it is better for him to say to you, "Come up here,"
than for him to humiliate you before a
nobleman.

Verse of the Day: Alleluia! Your words became a joy to me, and the delight of my heart. Alleluia! (Jeremiah 15:16)

Sermon Text: Proverbs 25:6-7

Have you been following the events surrounding Ryan Lochte? If you have not heard, Ryan Lochte is an United States Olympic swimmer. During his time at the Rio Olympics, Lochte told the press that he was robbed at gunpoint while in a taxi. Of course, the media instantly picked up on the story and highlighted police problems in Rio de Janeiro.

Now, as the host country, you do not want the entire world publishing negative reports about your city. So, the Rio police started an investigation into the events of that night. The police discovered a security camera that captured Lochte and three other Americans not in a taxi, but rather at a gas station. It reveals these four swimmers walking to the backside of the gas station, vandalizing the building, and then tossing around wall-signs and trash cans. Eventually the police appear and confront Lochte and other swimmers.

So, these events transform into a new media story. You have video proof that Lochte was not held at gunpoint. Instead you have evidence of an Olympic champion committing a crime, lying about it, and then trying to shift the blame. During his recent interview with Matt Lauer, Lochte called his story an "over-exaggeration" of what really happened. *"It's how you want to make it look like... Whether you call it a robbery or whether you call it extortion or us just paying for the damages, we don't know. All we know is that there was a gun pointed in our direction and we were demanded to give money."* (<http://abcnews.go.com/Sports/ryan-lochte-owns-overexaggerated-robbery-story/story?id=41611563>)

That is an interesting answer, is it not? You have video proof, police testimony, and confessions from the other swimmers about what really happened that night. If Lochte confesses to his crime, then he would tarnish his image. So, you have Lochte trying to

change the seriousness of what really happened. Put another way, the champion is trying to control the public's opinion of him.

Maybe a story like this does not surprise you; it seems to happen so often. People doing all they can— even redefining actual events— in the hope of protecting their pride. We are not immune from defending our pride at any cost either. Listen to what really makes you a person of importance. **THE KING EXALTS YOU!** *from claiming your own greatness, and makes you great.*

Maybe the question that instantly pops into your mind is: “Why?” What Lochte is doing— is it really all that bad? Or in our own lives, does it matter if we praise ourselves for hitting the game-winning run or for scoring the highest grade on a test or for making the most money in a career? If you take a look at your world, you see arrogance happening everywhere— and it does not always appear so bad. Let's take a look at our reading.

In Proverbs 25:6-7, Solomon paints this picture of an extravagant royal feast. Mighty oak tables fill an enormous banquet hall. Pressed white cloths cover each table. White, delicate dishes and glistening silverware decorate the tabletop. Serving dishes hold figs and raisins and breads, steaming vegetables, goat and quail meat.

You look to the front and center of the hall and see the king's throne— placed on a raised platform. Tables stream to the right and left of that throne; the chairs are reserved for his chiefs of staff and royal advisors and diplomats. The scene looks like our modern-day wedding banquets. You know... the bride and groom sitting center stage and the wedding party sitting beside them, the family seated near the front, and friends filling in the rest of the hall.

In the midst of this festive scene Solomon gives this warning: **Do not exalt yourself in the king's presence, and do not claim a place among great men...** It sounds like such obvious advice. I mean, if you were invited to a wedding— would you sit where the groom is to sit? Would you sit next to the father-of-the-bride? Would you pull up a chair next to the wedding party? No! You would never do that! So, why does Solomon even give such a warning? Because he is wise enough to know exactly what our hearts are capable of doing.

You see, Solomon is not just giving you pointers on formal dining etiquette. He is identifying an attitude. Look again at verse 6. Do you see who is doing the exalting? The king is not promoting you. Important men are not inviting you to sit beside them. Solomon is describing a person who elevates himself— a person who thinks so highly of himself that he wants more praise than the king and great men!

Look at your world. Do people think highly of themselves? Pride is what keeps an athlete from admitting that he vandalized a gas station. Pride moves people to push and sprint around you at the grocery store— because they are more concerned about their own personal agendas instead of how their actions impact you! Arrogance is what causes cyber-bullying— because you can hide behind a computer screen and, with a click of mouse and pitter-patter of the keyboard, belittle someone you consider “wrong” and

“stupid.” Pride is what can lead people like us to point a finger and blast out: “Yeah! Those people are rude, self-seeking, arrogant! Look how kind and caring I am!”

Selfish pride is a nasty two-headed monster. Pride in our own hearts can lead us to care little for others. Pride can also lead us to compare ourselves with others and see how much better we are!

It would seem that many people in the world recognize selfish pride is not something nice. We can sit here and talk about how uncaring pride really is. Yet, arrogance is not this problem in the world that we must put up with; it is a spiritual problem. You see, arrogance is not bad simply because it hurts other people. It is not bad because it makes you look selfish. What makes arrogance so dangerous is that it will stop at nothing until it claims the most praise in the world! That means, it wants more praise than God Almighty!

Want proof of that? Look at the very first pages of the Bible. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve ate some fruit. It looked pretty harmless— except for the fact that God expressly commanded them not to eat that fruit ([Genesis 2:15-17](#)). Adam and Eve looked at that fruit, their arrogance convinced them that they knew better than God, and then they ate that fruit. With one simple action, Adam and Eve boasted that they were important enough to live life by their own rules.

If left unchecked, pride and arrogance can lead us to do the very same thing. It can lead us to think we know more than God and do not need him. We may keep our Bibles shut because we think we already know what it says. We may see no need for worship because we have judged our lives to be just fine— or we think we already know what will be said. We feel a right to defend and justify sin and label it as something “necessary.” (that: “God understands if I hate my friend... or had to take money... or drink a little more...”). Pride will stop at nothing to *to claim your own greatness*— even if that means attacking God, the King!

Why is it better for **it is better for [the king] to say to you, “Come up here,” than for him to humiliate you before a nobleman?** Why is arrogance so bad? Because your sins humiliate you in the sight of God. You cannot be proud that you have disobeyed a perfect God! You cannot laugh that you have failed to love others with the same love God loved you. God does not want to hear excuses as to why you exalted your wants over his commands. Because of your sins, you can never be the kind of person God wants in heaven ([Leviticus 19:2](#); [Matthew 5:48](#); [Romans 3:23](#)). We constantly fall short of God’s standard of perfection!

Yet, **THE KING EXALTS YOU!** By grace alone (and “grace” means God’s undeserved love), the Father sends his beloved Son into your world. Just think about that. Jesus downgrades from living in a perfect heaven to living in a sin-broken world; the King humbles himself for you! That means Jesus lays aside the power he has as God. He lays aside the praise he deserves because he is God! He is born the son of a carpenter, not the son of a king. He befriends fishermen, not royal soldiers. Self-righteous Pharisees do not even give the Son of their God the seat of honor! ([Luke 14:1-14](#)).

In fact, Jesus humbles himself even lower than living at a “peasant” status! He actually places himself under the requirement of God’s commandments ([Galatians 4:4-5](#)). He makes sure his words never tear down reputations. He does not push past the sick and poor. Selfishness never keeps him out of worship. Jesus, the Son of God, willingly obeys God’s commandments. Then the King is sent to the cross because of our pride and arrogance. Jesus is humbled as God the Father forsakes him!

Who deserves treatment like that? You and I do. For our pride and arrogance against God, we deserve hell. Yet, you and I will never suffer this because the King has removed your punishment.

Now, **THE KING EXALTS YOU!** *and makes you great!* Understand what it means to be “great.” True, lasting “greatness” does not start with how the world sees you. It starts with how God sees you. If Jesus has removed your sins, then what does God see on you? No sin! He sees you as perfect, clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ! What greater status is there than “child of God” and “heir of eternal life”?!

You get the privilege of standing in that great banquet hall at a phenomenal feast. You look to the front and center of the hall and see the king’s throne—a place reserved for God. Tables stream to the right and left of that throne; the chairs are reserved for you—people made great through the work of Jesus.

Understand also, that you and I are already “great.” God has equipped you to be very special people in this world. Martin Luther once said that we are “masks of God” in this world. That is, through your life of Christian service, you are bringing God’s loving care to someone else. People get to see God’s love through you.

So, you imitate the humble love of Jesus by visiting the sick or giving encouragement to the sad. You, the adult, get to speak to little children (someone who looks “small” in the eyes of the world; you smile at them and ask what they learned in Sunday School. You willingly expose yourself to insult as you reach out to lost and straying friends. You dedicate your time and service to your God. You vacuum and clean. You pick weeds and water. You hold doors for others. Your life is one of humble service because you are imitating the humble service Jesus had for you!

Sometimes people may not recognize the work you do. They may not thank you. Yet, in God’s eyes, you are someone “great.” Your heart beats with a humble love to serve.

That, my friends, is the reason you serve in humility. Your world may still thump its chest and suck in praise for itself. People may change real events in order to control public opinions. Yet, you—you are people who are great. The Son of God has given you the title: “child of God.” He has equipped you to be little beacons of light in this sin-darkened world. You are a person of importance. **THE KING EXALTS YOU!** *from claiming your own greatness, and makes you great.*