

Holly Aloise's Sermon October 17, 2021

Well, today's passages are certainly humbling! God is God, and we are not. Even Jesus as a human being was obedient and submitted Himself to God's will. Think about that for a moment- even Jesus, the Son of God, humbled himself and did things He didn't necessarily want to do at the time (thinking about His prayer at Golgotha that this cup might be taken from Him, but nevertheless, "Not My will, but Thine"). He did so much more than we could ever **really** imagine, all because it was God's will to save humankind. That in itself is pretty humbling, that He did all of that for me, and for you. That's a lot of love.

In the Hebrews passage we just read, it points out that the high priest is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness. Even the high priest, who was the only one allowed to enter the innermost part of the temple, even a man that holy was still a sinner and still needed saving. We all do. We all sin, we all mess up, probably daily. As much as we humans like to compare ourselves to others, like the Pharisee in the temple who prayed, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people- robbers, evildoers, adulterers- or even this tax collector", as much as we like to do that to make ourselves feel better about our own sins, we're still sinners. The great thing is that God still loves us, unconditionally, and that Jesus became human. He was here. He gets it. He knows what it's like to be tired, overworked, maybe a little hangry sometimes. He knows what it's like to deal with the general public on a daily basis, taking care of their needs and dealing with all of their demands. I'm sure Jesus faced His fair share of Karens in His line of work. He saw the very worst of people, met them at their lowest points, saw the worst of society in general. And yet, He dealt gently with them. When they followed Him across the lake, He fed them. When the woman touched His cloak without permission, He healed her. Although I know there were times Jesus disappeared for a while to rest and reconnect with God (another sermon), I can't recall a single instance of Him turning someone away, other than the Syro-phoenician woman whom David talked about last month, and in the end, He did take care of her needs, too. Even when everyone turned against Him, taunted Him, tortured Him, beat Him to a bloody pulp, He still willingly died a very painful and humiliating death in order to save them. Think about that for a second. Think about any people in your life who have hurt you, maybe even made your life completely miserable. That's the kind of people Jesus was willing to die for. Talk about being compassionate and understanding and dealing gently with people.

Now I don't think God is necessarily asking us to lay down our lives for the schoolyard bully or that really obnoxious coworker, but He does want us to deal gently with one another. Especially right now, when everyone is so stressed out. Everyone's nerves are frayed. Even the gentlest among us is prone to snapping at people occasionally these days. I know I've had days when my patience with people has worn thin. It seems like we're all running on empty, with too much being thrown at us and maybe not enough fuel to get through, physically, spiritually, mentally, or emotionally. I think it's important that we name that and acknowledge that reality in ourselves and in those around us. If we keep that in mind, hopefully we can keep our own tempers in check and also be a little more patient and compassionate with other people.

I've noticed that there's an undercurrent of fear present in our society today. Between the pandemic, all of the political infighting and instability, and climate change, just to name a few things going on right now, there's a lot on our minds. Show of hands- who here has felt at least a little bit scared about something this year? Assuming that this is a fairly accurate representation of society at large, that's a lot of fear being felt right now. Are we generally at our best when we're scared? Of course not! We get that adrenaline and cortisol pumping through our bodies, different parts of our brain literally shut down to conserve energy and allow us to focus on fighting or fleeing. This is not the time for good decision making and rational behavior. This is definitely not us at our best. To some extent or another, a lot of people are basically in survival mode right now. They're afraid. They're afraid of COVID, or they're afraid of the vaccines or of losing their freedom. They're afraid of climate change, or they're afraid of the life changes that are necessary to prevent it. And whatever side they're on, they seem to be afraid of each other. We need to remember that we're all in this together, and that God is still taking care of us. We don't need to be so afraid of each other and our present circumstances. We need to use common sense and work together to figure out what needs to be done, and we need to hit our knees and start praying, or keep praying, for God's help. Remember, He is able to do **everything** we can't do for ourselves. And He still loves us and wants to help us through this. We just have to ask. And then we have to have faith and trust that He will answer our prayers and give us the help that we so desperately need right now. And He will. One thing we know for sure is that God is faithful. Amen? He doesn't give up on us and walk away. He is faithful to the end. We can relax a bit and trust that He will be there for us when we need Him.

The other thing we can do is lean on each other. When I lived in Boston, I learned a lot about interdependence. Now I know the culture here in Montana is one of fierce independence. And I get that. It's good to work hard and take care of yourself when you can. There's something to be said about pulling yourself up by your bootstraps. But when the bootstraps break, we need to be able **and willing** to lean on each other- preferably before they break. When we have something to offer somebody, we help them out. And then when we need help, we have the grace to let them return the favor. It's a win-win situation. Everyone's needs get met, everyone has the chance to feel useful, and we become a much stronger and closer community in the process. I've seen it in action, and it's a wonderful thing- Heaven on Earth.

So, big takeaways today- trust God- He's got your back. Take care of each other, and let other people take care of your needs so that you can keep being your best self and not feel like you're running on empty, and deal gently with each other. We've all got a lot on our plates right now, and an extra dose of patience and kindness goes especially far in times like this.