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 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent  
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***Humility: Moving Up by Coming Down***  
***Luke 14: 7-14***

*When he noticed how the guests **chose the places of honor**, he told them a **parable**.<sup>8</sup> "When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, **do not sit down at the place of honor**, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host;<sup>9</sup> and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, 'Give this person your place,' and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place.<sup>10</sup> But when you are invited, **go and sit down at the lowest place**, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you.<sup>11</sup> For all who **exalt** themselves will be humbled, and those who **humble** themselves will be exalted."*

*<sup>12</sup> He said also to the one who had invited him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, **do not invite your friends** or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid.<sup>13</sup> But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.<sup>14</sup> And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."*

After officiating at a funeral, the Pastor was asked to **lead the funeral procession** to the cemetery. So he got into his car, and started driving at the head of the procession. He flipped on his radio and became preoccupied, lost in thought. About that time, he passed a store, and thought about something he needed to pick up. As soon as he turned into the parking lot, he just happened to glance into the rear-view mirror--and saw the string of cars following, all with their lights on! *Mary Graves, "Getting Sober for Christmas," Preaching Today, No. 135.*

I remember one day in my last call, I was feeling good about Sunday school, I was looking forward to a great worship service.... and I stopped into the restroom before worship.... And just then a woman comes flying in screaming "**Your microphone is on!**" Let's just say you only make that mistake ONCE.

When my son was little and it was **career day** at his elementary school I just knew he would invite me to come.  
I mean there were no other female pastors in town, so no other kid would have a pastor-mom!  
I was quickly informed that if I worked at Sonic and wore roller skates to work, like he had suggested when I took a job at a church, then I would be asked to career day!

When have you **been humbled by life**?

Humility doesn't come easily, does it?  
Isn't it something most of us learn **the hard way**?

And what does it mean for us to **BE humble, like Jesus**?  
What does **humility mean** to you?

Jesus illustrated it by saying we are to take the **lowest seat** at the table. *when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you.*

Paul describes it as **the way of Jesus Christ**, in **Philippians 2**: *do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit but in humility regard others as better than yourself. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.*

Now, some have **misinterpreted** humility as being a **doormat** for others. Or **self-humiliation**.  
But Jesus never supported people not valuing their own life and gifts. That is a warped view of humility.

Sometimes people have misinterpreted humility to mean that they should go **so far** in putting the interests of others first, that they **really EXALT themselves with self-righteousness and pride**— Hoping to be considered great for being so selfless.  
Jesus was not for this either—he knows our hearts and minds.

So what is true **humility**?

Well, what if it means ***going against our culture?***

Our culture says that we should constantly

be striving to ***move up*** in the world--to be better, best, number 1.

We are supposed to look good, all the time—Instagram and Facebook ready!

***Upward mobility*** is the name of the game, in jobs, school, communities, it can even be this way in churches!

But Jesus offers a different way—

the ***way of coming down***, of self-emptying, of humility.

And he says that those who exalt themselves will be humbled,

And those who humble themselves will be exalted.

***So, the true way up is by coming down.***

This principle of humbling and exalting is also found in ***Proverbs 29:23***.

Jesus turned that old proverb ***into a parable***

when he sees the people at the Pharisee's house

***vying for the best seats*** at the table. Jesus says,

*"When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; <sup>9</sup> and the host .. may come and say to you, 'Give this person your place,' and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. <sup>10</sup> But when you are invited, ***go and sit down at the lowest place.***"*

All of this coming down is contrary

to our ***natural human desire to be better, best, first.***

Priest and author Henri Nouwen wrote: *"The story of our salvation stands radically over and against the philosophy of upward mobility. The great ***paradox*** which Scripture reveals to us is that real and total freedom can only be found through ***downward mobility***. The Word of God came down to us, and lived among us as a slave. The divine way is indeed the ***downward way.***"* ("The Selfless Way of Christ", Sojourners, June 1981, pg. 13-14, as cited in James Harnish, "Living with the Mind of Christ".)

But how can we ***embrace this downward way*** of Jesus Christ?

How do we let go of pride and arrogance?

And get ***real*** about ourselves?

How do we truly love one another, by putting *others first*?

Because it's not so easy to just walk out of here,  
 rid ourselves of all pride,  
 And suddenly start putting everyone else first, is it?  
 Humility is a ***GIFT to be learned and practiced.***

Remember last week, when we talked about ***surrender, and letting go?***  
 What if this is one of those areas where we have to let go of our pride,  
 And surrender our egos,  
 So that we might ***accept the GIFT of humility.***

Rev. James Harnish, who wrote *Living with the Mind of Christ*  
 Has some wise and practical advice  
 for those of us who are trying to ***learn and practice humility.***

First, he says let go of all that pride---  
***don't take yourself too seriously.***  
 Learn to ***laugh*** at yourself.  
 When was the last time you did this?  
 Seems like there are regular occasions for this in ***my life and ministry!***

Rick Warren, author of *The Purpose Driven Life*, says that  
 most of us take ***ourselves too seriously,***  
 and ***don't take God seriously*** enough!  
 He reminds us that ***humility and humor*** come from the same root word!  
 (James Harnish, *Living With the Mind of Christ*, pg. 40)

British writer and theologian G.K. Chesterton said that all the saints  
 had the ***power of 'levity'***... "*it is easy to be heavy, but hard to be light.*  
*Satan fell by gravity...Angels can fly because they take themselves so lightly"*  
 (from *Orthodoxy*, Mineola, NY., Dover, 2004, pg. 120-1)  
 Oh how I love that image--***Flying, laughing angels.***

How might you start ***laughing at yourself*** a little bit more?  
 Can you think of any ridiculous things you've done lately?  
 If I were to start confessing we'd be here all day.....  
 We can't take ourselves too seriously, if we want to be humble.

And the other bit of advice from Rev. Harnish?  
 Another way to find humility?  
 Treat other people *like royalty*.

**Why?**

It's that *putting others first* mind-set.

So let's imagine *each person* that you meet  
 is an *honored guest* coming to dinner at your house,  
 or an important person, meeting at your office,  
 or a famous leader, coming here to church.  
 What would it *mean for us to treat people royally?*

Imagine someone you *DON'T treat* this way.....  
 What would it mean to start treating them as royalty?

Now, why is this such a powerful exercise?  
 It's meaningful because it is the way *God TREATS US!*  
 God treats each one of us *as royalty!*

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*Of course, Jesus is our example in the downward way.*

Jesus took his relationship with God very seriously,  
 But he took his life more lightly.

Jesus loved parties!

How many times do we read about him at a dinner party?

His *first miracle*, turning water into wine, was to keep a wedding feast going!

And Jesus treated *everyone* as royalty—  
 especially the prostitutes and tax collectors,  
 those others would never have invited to dinner....

He *treats US as royalty*....

even when we've done our worst, fallen off the wagon,  
 committed the same old sins....

Have you ever had people in your life *like Jesus?*  
 Treating you like royalty?

Think back for a moment,

about the **most treasured people** in your life....  
 How did they make you feel important, that you matter,  
 that you have the potential for greatness?

James Harnish says:

*Isn't it interesting that the **great people** in our lives  
 are not the most proud and haughty,  
 who try to impress us with **their** greatness.....  
 But instead they are usually the ones who **help US achieve greatness?***  
 (James Harnish, Living With the Mind of Christ, pg. 40)

**So, what about us?**

To whom can we go, and encourage **their greatness?**  
 Who can you mentor?  
 Who can you encourage?  
 Who can you lift up, today, this week?

Talk about a changed world—what if we all took on this attitude—  
 And spent time **helping someone else** achieve greatness?

We all have people in our lives **we can 'exalt'**, besides ourselves.  
 And along the way,  
 we can find ourselves **laughing at our own pride.**

Humility is a **way of life** we can embrace....  
 By embracing the people around us, instead of ourselves.  
 We can take the lowest seat at the table, we can empty ourselves,  
 Knowing that ultimately, **Jesus is the one** who will lift us up,  
 He is the one whose **Spirit** will encourage us, mentor us, and exalt us.  
 We do not need to take on this task ourselves.  
 We don't have to move ourselves up in life.

And, we don't always have to learn humility the hard way....  
 By doing something supremely silly.  
 Sometimes we can learn it by **doing something right---**  
 By **following** in the footsteps of Christ.

Humility is a way of life that brings as much **JOY** for us,  
 as the kind of **JOY** we receive

***when humble people bless*** our lives!

So ***go ahead***, and sit down low.

Take the last place in line.

Let all the other cars go first.

And take time to encourage someone who needs a little boost.

Then laugh at that ridiculous thing you did.

We'll never regret this way of life, this coming down....

Because it is the way to ***NEW LIFE in Christ***.

***It is sheer JOY.***

***It is the Good News of the Gospel.***

And for it, all God's people can say together, Amen.