



**From the Pulpit: October 1, 2023**

Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time—World Communion Day

**The Reverend Dr. William A. Evertsberg**

I Corinthians 13:1–4; Luke 14:7–11

*The Greatest of These, IV: Humility*

This fall we're preaching a sermon series called The Greatest of These from 1 Corinthians 13 where we will begin:

*If I speak in the tongues of humans and of angels but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions and if I hand over my body so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude.*

Now from the life of Jesus, Luke chapter 14:

*When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. "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, 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. But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."*

“Jesus notices the universal human craving for prestige and visibility... Jesus is not really disdainful or dismissive of this universal human craving; he just gently says, “Take the low seat. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves with be exalted.”

One day Jesus goes to a wedding and on his way in to the reception he stops at the table where they keep all the name tents, and he watches other people pick up their table assignments and some are delighted because they're sitting at Table One with the MOB and the FOB, and others are disappointed because they're sitting at Table 39 with the groom's third cousins, and Jesus notices the universal human craving for prestige and visibility.

Everybody always wants to sit in the skybox with Taylor at the Chiefs game, or take the first-class pod on Cathay Pacific with its own shower and microwave, or sit in the first row at Symphony Center where they can practically touch Maestro Muti's boot, or up tight against the runway at the fashion show.

Jesus is not really disdainful or dismissive of this universal human craving; he just gently says, “Take the low seat. All who **exalt** themselves will be **humbled**, and all who **humble** themselves with be **exalted**.”

In St. Paul's multi-faceted description of the common concept of love in I Corinthians 13, he tells us that there are some things love **IS**, but there are more things love **IS NOT**. Love **IS** patient. Love **IS** kind. Love **IS NOT** envious or boastful or arrogant or rude.

Paul doesn't quite say this, but almost: it is impossible to be loving and arrogant at the same time.

I was at a Board meeting a while back—not here, but in some other church—I was at a Board meeting where we were discussing an important but controversial matter over which people of good conscience might differ, and one of the participants expressed his opinion with such a strident tone and with such implacable certitude that a hush fell over the room.

I wanted to repeat what Oliver Cromwell wrote to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1650: "I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you might be mistaken." Your wife might ask you a perfectly reasonable question, and you might answer with an attitude that suggests she really ought to know the answer without asking. "Who is Travis Kelce?" she might ask. "Only the most famous football player in America," you might answer. In a million years, you would never condescend like that with anyone else in your life, but you are so secure in that relationship that you forget your manners.

Just remember this: boastfulness is often camouflage for disabling insecurity. A person who tries so hard to convince the world that he is God's gift is really worried inside that he'll never truly measure up to his comrades.

And so we don't judge the boastful too harshly, because inside he is waging a fierce battle with himself. She presents to the world as a princess with a flowing gown, a tiara, and glass slippers, but inside it's all rags and cinders.

Arrogance can turn "I am very blessed to earn my six-figure salary," into "I'm not going to hang out with schoolteachers anymore; they always want to eat at Taco Bell."

Arrogance can turn "I'm having a blast being a scratch golfer," into "I'm never going to play another round with a 24-handicap." Can you tell I take this personally?

Now, some of us have no choice in the matter of humility. Some of us have children. One single mother began dating a Captain in the United States Army, and when she introduced him to her seven-year-old daughter for the first time, the little girl noticed the insignia of his

rank—you know those two beautiful, noble, vertical bars on his collar? He'd worked hard to get those two vertical bars. And the little girl reaches up to touch that insignia, and she says, "Is that your 'Pause' button?"<sup>1</sup>

Children are good at bestowing the virtue of humility. The comedian Jack Benny is from Waukegan, Illinois. They named a school after him: The Jack Benny Junior High School. Ten years after the school opened, Jack Benny gave a speech at Jack Benny Junior High School. When it was over, a twelve-year-old boy asked him, "Mr. Benny, why did they name you after our school?"<sup>2</sup>

**Loving** people are **balanced** people. They avoid self-abasement, on the one hand, and self-aggrandizement

on the other. They are secure enough in themselves that they do not have to flaunt their accomplishments on the marquee. They know they belong to God. They know they are greatly loved, so greatly loved, they can greatly love, and greatly live. Glennon Doyle tells her children, "Be very proud because you are a child of God. Be very humble because so is everybody else."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Angela Owens, *Reader's Digest*, March, 2008, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup>*The Little, Brown Book of Anecdotes*, ed. Clifton Fadiman (Boston: Little, Brown, 1985), pp. 54–55.

<sup>3</sup><https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/pray- ceaselessly>.

During the American Revolution, a Continental Army officer, dressed in civilian clothes, rode past a group of soldiers building a fortification of earth and stone and timbers at the front. One man was shouting instructions at the soldiers from the comfort of horseback, but he was not lending a hand to the effort. When the officer dressed in civilian clothes asked this man why he was not putting his shoulder to the task, the man responded, "Sir, I am a corporal." The officer dressed in civilian clothes apologized, dismounted, and proceeded to help the soldiers himself.

When the task was completed, the officer dressed in civilian clothes turned to the corporal and said, "Corporal, the next time you have a job like this and not enough men to do it, go to your Commander in Chief, and I will come and help you again." Just at that moment, the Corporal recognized General George Washington, but it was too late.<sup>4</sup> And that's why that guy will always be a corporal, and that's why the name of George Washington echoes down the corridors of time. If you refuse to seek vain glory, your fellow citizens will grant you the genuine kind.

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Have I told you the story of the rabbinical students who deeply respected the wise and kind rabbi who taught them Hebrew and theology? They admired him so much that they watched him constantly.

After watching this for weeks, a student asked him what was written on those scraps of paper that was important enough to interrupt his prayers. And he told them that there were two passages of Scripture on those scraps.

And they asked "Different passages all the time?" And he answered "No the same ones." "Which Scriptures?" they asked. "In my right pocket it says 'I am created in the image of God.' And in my left it says 'I am formed from the dust of the earth.' It keeps me balanced" he explained.

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<sup>4</sup>From *The Little, Brown Book of Anecdotes*, ed. Clifton Fadiman (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1985), p. 571.

**—The Great Prayer—**  
**Sarah Champlin**

It is right, and a good and joyful thing,  
always and everywhere to give thanks to you,  
Almighty God,  
Maker of heaven and earth,  
Who set the stars in the sky and the deep roots of the Earth,  
Who made the vast expanse of the universe and the intimate spaces within our hearts.  
We gather around this table on World Communion Sunday, celebrating the worldwide family of faith.

Across continents and cultures, from every corner of this Earth, we join hands and hearts, sharing the sacred meal that transcends borders and breaks down barriers. Today we remember the life of Jesus, who walked upon this Earth, tending to the sick, comforting the grieving, and standing against injustice. As we prepare to partake in this sacred meal, we hold in our hearts the reality of a changing world and the urgency of the hour.

Lord, we ask that you cover the world in your mercy and peace, particularly those around the world whose lives, homes, and livelihoods have been irrevocably changed due to natural disasters. We pray especially for those affected by flooding in the city of New York, where the rising waters bear testament to our global challenge. Awaken in us Lord, a renewed commitment to care for your good gift of creation, the Earth, our shared home.

We lift up those grappling with illness, whether in body, spirit, or mind. In the breaking of the bread, may they find solace, healing, and the warmth of a global community wrapping them in love and prayers.

As the cup is shared, we lift up those in the throes of grief. Comfort them Lord. Let them feel your presence and rest in your love that never ends.

For those confronting the horrors of violence, be their shield and their refuge. Empower us as a community to stand firm against hate and to advocate for justice. Let this communion stand as a testament to our shared commitment to turn our swords into plowshares and sow seeds of peace in all corners of the world.

Jesus you taught us the depths of love and the call to shared responsibility. Transform us and ignite in us a desire to rebuild, to comfort, to protect, and to be stewards of the world you have entrusted to our care. On this World Communion Sunday, Jesus remind us of the sacred bond that ties us all together. Unite us as one body, inspired and guided by your Spirit, to be bearers of hope for a world desperately in need.

Holy and Transformative God, all praise and honor and glory are yours, now and forever. Let us join our voices in the prayer that Jesus taught us: Our Father.... Amen.

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KENILWORTH UNION CHURCH  
211 Kenilworth Avenue, Kenilworth Illinois 60043  
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