November 1, 2026
"No 'I' in Team"
Psalm 34:1-10 / Matthew 23:1-12
Pastor Tim

"All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted."

That's what Jesus says after calling out the self-righteous "scribes and Pharisees"—the Jewish religious leaders who sought to preserve, to copy, to interpret Mosaic law; teachers and self-proclaimed keepers of the law.

Those, Jesus asserts here and asserted time and time again, who failed to walk their talk. Who were so fine-tuned to the LETTER of the law that they ended up tone-deaf to its SPIRIT.

Pharisees literally means "separated ones." And so they were.

"All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted."

On its surface, humility is presented as the opposite of self-exaltation. And what is the opposite of self-exaltation? Something like self-degradation. What is the opposite of self-promotion? Something like self-denial. Right?

And while that is too often how humility has been and continues to be understood and practiced, perhaps especially in the Church, that is not what humility is. That is not what Jesus is talking about.

Cara preached last week about Jesus' simple summary of Mosaic law—reducing its letter to its essential spirit. To love your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. And to love your neighbor as yourself. We know this.

But too often humility has been and continues to be understood and practiced, perhaps especially in the Church, as loving your neighbor at the expense of yourself. Loving your neighbor as necessarily self-sacrificial.

But that is not what humility is. That is not what Jesus is talking about.

The dictionary definition of humility is this: "The quality of being free from pride, arrogance, or ego, and having an accurate, grounded assessment of one's abilities, limits, and place among others."

I've always liked Frederick Buechner's take. He uses the example of bridge—you know, the card game. He writes:

> *Humility is often confused with saying you're not much of a bridge player when you know perfectly well you are. Conscious or otherwise, this kind of humility is a form of gamesmanship. If you really aren't much of a bridge player, you're apt to be rather proud of yourself for admitting it so humbly. This kind of humility is a form of low comedy.*
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> *True humility doesn't consist of thinking ill of yourself but of not thinking of yourself much differently from the way you'd be apt to think of anybody else. It is the capacity for being no more and no less pleased when you play your own hand well than when your opponents do.*

In other words, love your neighbor AS yourself. As yourself. As yourself!

Humility is not self-sacrifice, self-denial, self-degradation. Humility is not the opposite of exaltation, it's the antidote.

We all know plenty of people—in our lives and in the world—who consistently, arrogantly exalt themselves but are never humbled. Never brought down to earth. And we also know plenty of people who consistently, authentically humble themselves but are never exalted. Never brought up to heaven.

So I hear Jesus' assertion as invitational, aspirational. A description not of the world as it is, but the world as it can be. A description of the kindom of God—emphasis on KIN.

The antidote to pride and arrogance and ego and self-exaltation in others—and in ourselves—is seeing and treating each other as kin. And being seen and treated as kin.

As family. Loving each other as we love ourselves. Loving our way into the world we want, the world as it can be, the world as it is meant to be.

Those who do that, the Psalmist insists from our reading, will have no want. And lack no good thing.

The truth of Jesus' assertion may not always be borne out in our lives as they are, and in the world as it is. But it IS borne out in beloved community—ANNOYING as that can sometimes be, as Cara acknowledged last week.

We are both humbled and exalted in beloved community. In the KINdom of God as Jesus calls it, the playing field is leveled. The practice AND experience of love has a way of HUMBLING our and others' INFLATED self-worth. The practice AND experience of love has a way of EXALTING our and others' DEFLATED self-worth.

Whether we think too much or too little of ourselves, it comes from the same place—pride. An over-fixation on our egos. Low self-esteem, self-hatred, self-loathing are all just pride in disguise.

Humility, as Jesus prescribes, is the antidote. Humility grounded in beloved community—in the practice and experience of mutually authentic, mutually accountable love. Loving our neighbors as we love ourselves. Loving ourselves as we love our neighbors.

There is no 'I' in team! That, friends, is what we celebrate today.

SAINTS who have humbly loved us, who have humbly shown us how to love. Who continue to inspire and empower us to go and do likewise.

And NEW MEMBERS who remind us that we are all family, all kin; that community's where it's at. Who ask us to publicly reaffirm our commitment—as they have today affirmed theirs—to love each other accordingly. Not perfectly, and God knows not always humbly, but ALWAYS intentionally, ALWAYS persistently.

Fueled by the love of saints who have gone before us, this is where we practice.

May it be so.