

9.04.22 – Pentecost 13
“The Foolishness of Pride”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

2 Chronicles 7:11-22 (NASB) ~ Pam

God's Promise and Warning

¹¹ So Solomon finished the house of the Lord and the king's palace, and successfully completed everything that he had planned on doing in the house of the Lord and in his palace.

¹² Then the Lord appeared to Solomon at night and said to him, “I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice. ¹³ If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send a plague among My people, ¹⁴ and My people who are called by My name humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. ¹⁵ Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to the prayer *offered in this place*. ¹⁶ For now I have chosen and consecrated this house so that My name may be there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there always. ¹⁷ As for you, if you walk before Me as your father David walked, to do according to everything that I have commanded you, and keep My statutes and My ordinances, ¹⁸ then I will establish your royal throne as I covenanted with your father David, saying, ‘You shall not lack a man *to be* ruler in Israel.’

¹⁹ “But if you turn away and abandon My statutes and My commandments which I have set before you, and go and serve other gods and worship them, ²⁰ then I will uproot you from My land which I have given you, and this house which I have consecrated for My name I will cast out of My sight; and I will make it a proverb and an object of scorn among all peoples. ²¹ As for this house, which was exalted, everyone who passes by it will be astonished and say, ‘Why has the Lord done these things to this land and to this house?’ ²² And they will say, ‘Because they abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers, who brought them from the land of Egypt, and they adopted other gods, and worshiped and served them; therefore He has brought all this adversity on them.’”

L: These are the Lord's Words to Solomon. C: Thanks be to God!

Luke 18:9-14 (NIV) ~ Pam

The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

⁹ To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰ “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

¹³ “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’”

¹⁴ “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Leader: These are Important Words from Jesus. People: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Forgiving God, we heard two stories with choices of humility or pride; please help us to understand the meanings and make the right choices in our own lives. We yearn to follow your statutes, yet our inner arrogance often prevails. We ask you to transform our arrogance into humility, and our primary relationship with self into one with you, even though we do not deserve your mercy. Thank you for our time together this morning. Please guide our ears and minds as we listen and speak about the dangers of pride. Amen.

Happy “Labor Sunday”! Did you know that in 1909, the American Federation of Labor convention designated the Sunday before Labor Day as "Labor Sunday", to be dedicated to the spiritual and educational aspects of the labor movement? The industrial age spanned from 1865-1917, and in 1900 more than 77 million Americans lived together in a melting pot of more than 30 nationalities. 60% of Americans still worked on farms in 1900, but nearly 40% lived in cities, making the United States the leading industrial nation on earth, surpassing England. Initially, a day to celebrate the achievements of American labor unions, Labor Day has now become a day off to celebrate **all** workers’ productivity, their contributions to society, and to celebrate the unofficial “last day of summer!” So many just think it’s the weekend the pools close! I like understanding that freedom to work and earn a living were some of the original motives for this holiday tomorrow.

Today’s parable and Old Testament passages could be slightly related to work, but in the spirit of “Labor Sunday,” let’s focus on the internal spiritual issues going on. In 2 Chronicles, we learn more about King David’s son, Solomon, who became king after his father. In Chapter

3, he built the temple in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the Lord had appeared to David. In Chapter 4, we read about the furnishings of the temple, then in 5 the priest brought the ark there where the Lord's glory filled the temple. In Chapter 6, Solomon blessed the Lord in praise, and dedicated the temple (considered his greatest work) with a long prayer. Chapter 7 begins after his prayer, when fire from heaven came down to consume the sacrifices. The people were reassured of this good work, so all feasted and prayed for 14 days.

The term "chronicles" is defined as a historical account of events arranged in order of time usually without analysis or interpretation. Our passage, 7:11-22, was written by a historian's scribe and likely taken from 1 Kings 9:1-19, read more often than the Chronicles records. In this section, we read how the people vowed to follow the Lord's statutes. We also hear about Solomon's vision from God: if you follow all that I have taught and asked of you, you will find favor as a king, but if not (if you serve other gods and worship them), I will destroy you, the temple and the land as a sign to all people of my judgment. Verse 14 is a key verse: "¹⁴ if my people who are called by my name **humble themselves** and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land." Israel, known as God's people (Jacob's 12 sons and the 12 tribes), belonged to God and they must submit to his authority. God insists that they pray sincerely to him and see his presence as they do, turning from sin toward repentance; "humbling, praying, seeking, and turning" are understood as four aspects of the process of biblical repentance. If they do, God will **hear** them, **forgive** them, and most importantly **heal** them. That may sound conditional as

you re-read it this week but know that it is more “covenantal” – a mutual agreement where both parties have accountability – human responsibility and divine intervention.

We know from hindsight that God kept his word by sending his son Jesus to atone for our sin and generations of humankind’s sin. Sadly, we also know that although he was a wise king, Solomon’s pride and ambition got the best of him: he did worship other gods, the temple was destroyed, and the people were exiled (2 Chronicles 36:19). That is the foolishness of pride and putting self above God.

This takes us to Jesus’ parable of the two men praying in the re-built temple of his day. The setting is Jerusalem. The temple was used for both private and public prayer on specific occasions. This was a time the temple was open for private prayer and meditation, but worshippers were slowly gathering. The Pharisee as you heard, catalogued all his attributes as we would do on a resume for a job, where it’s necessary to tell the truth but parade your accomplishments to get the position. He ignores those gathering for worship and focuses on himself, like many of us do today. Have you ever taken a “selfie” photo? It’s a photo of yourself sometimes with other people, but the origin was a mirror pic of a new outfit, special makeup or hair, exaggerated model-like facial expressions, with pets, boyfriends, and family, especially on vacations. The original selfish motive was to “brand” oneself to create a “profile” or certain image for social media like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or for dating websites like eHarmony, Match.com or Tinder.

If we’d had social media in the day of our story, the Pharisee would have made a Tik Tok video of himself praying in all his extravagant

robes, hoods, and jewels. He listed how he not only followed but exceeded the religious rules by fasting *two* times a week and tithing all his income (not necessarily all his possessions though); he was a patriot and declared himself righteous before God.

The tax collector (called a *publican* for his public service, though despised by all Jews) was also praying privately before worship, but kept his head bowed in contrition and humility. He knew his shortcomings: he was dishonest, taking bribes and disappointing God, yet needed forgiveness, so he courageously prayed anyway. The publican blamed himself, and though he felt unworthy, he was the one justified and forgiven by God. He went home a free man, open to transformation; whereas the Pharisee blamed everyone else for his life and went home in shame. Both examples point to each one's destiny on earth and in eternity. The Pharisee had a poor understanding of God as a taskmaster, whereas the Publican had a personal relationship with God, and in his awe and humble spirit, saw him as a gracious, loving and merciful God.

Institutionalizing piety (making religion only a set of rules) creates prideful competition and brings out human ambition. Contrast that with a sense of service and humility. Solomon began with that, but God knew his heart, and anticipated his failure. Isn't that the same with us? We start out well with humble motives of serving others, and yet as humans, our pride takes over. Every CROP Walk year, this occurs to me how we have church teams (a competitive sport term), and use the numbers for encouragement, but also how we must battle against the internal pride of raising the most funds to help people! I see it as a discipleship lesson for any institutionalized service project. I did sales for 30 years, so I truly

know this human tendency toward competition! Even pastors must be careful not to compete. We can live more humbly by being aware of the dangers and foolishness of pride. Some recognition is **good** to spur and encourage us onward, but I too must be cautious when you tell me you like a particular sermon. It encourages me, yes, but my internal selfie must be filtered to remember I am growing and can always do better—not a false humility, but a true sense of humble gratitude. Pride by itself is not a bad thing; we are designed by God to have pride and self-assurance, but like anything taken to an extreme, it can be foolish and dangerous.

What about you? As we come to the Lord's table, let us take a moment to silently confess our sins, knowing that we have the same choices Solomon did: we can obey God in honor of Christ's sacrifice and atonement for our sin, or we can rebel in pride and foolishness for our own self-satisfaction and self-rule. Can we accept the transformation God offers through his Son and his sacrifice, or will we rely on our own self-sufficiency and arrogance to live here on earth and forgo an eternity with God? It's your decision. I'm here to help you wrestle with it. Amen! ||

Will you pray with me? Lord, thank you for this reminder that pride is a sin and a choice. Help us to be more humble in all our worldly and spiritual affairs. Help us be good workers and better stewards of your gifts within us, our time, tithes, and talents. May we pray for others before ourselves and listen for your direction. Help us to serve others in discreet ways that do not feed our egos. Help us to share the Gospel by our transparency and testimonies. In Jesus' name we pray, **Amen.**