

10 March 2019 Heart Renovation: Sin, Pride, and Humility

Genesis 3:1-7 / Luke 18:9-14

A news story circulated one Christmas recently about a UPS delivery man. A father in Texas had ordered a new iPad mini for his daughter for Christmas. The FedEx delivery guy arrived on the door step to deliver it. And finding no one home, he dropped the iPad mini on the step and left. A couple hours later a UPS delivery guy shows up and also has a package to deliver. He rings the bell, but no one comes so he lays his package on the step. As he does he notices the FedEx package, but what he does not notice is the security camera overhead. And the UPS guy goes back to his truck. Two minutes go by. Then the UPS delivery guy gets out of his truck, goes back to the door,

picks up the FedEx box with the iPad mini, slips it under his clipboard and goes back to the truck and leaves.

Methodist preacher, Adam Hamilton asks, “So what was going on during the two minutes in the truck?” I think you know. The self-justification probably went something like this: “Nobody is going to ever know. No one will be hurt. This company doesn't pay me enough anyway. Insurance is going to cover this. Some big company is going to pay—and that’s not a bad thing.”

So what might the “two minutes in the truck” have looked like for Adam and Eve? We don't even need a talking snake to hear this kind of voice: “Do you think that God really meant for

us not to eat that lovely looking fruit on this tree? It smells wonderful. It's probably some kind of reverse psychology—God actually really wants us to eat it. In fact it's probably really good for us, maybe it's even brain food and would make us that much smarter."

The talking snake inside our heads is amazingly resourceful in it's capacity to self-justify. What's one click on that porn site really going to do? What difference is one more drink going to make? What's one little lie? What difference will one time make? What difference? The iPad mini was under \$400 and the UPS guy was going to jail.

The inclination toward sin is at the root of all of our natures. Even Jesus faced Satan's

temptations. We all struggle with good and evil, right and wrong. We all spend two minutes in the truck. Today's Genesis story is not just a story about Adam and Eve; this is our story. All of us have heard the smooth voice of the talking snake. Paul says in Romans 7, "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want to do is what I do."

The Greek word for sin in the New Testament is *hamartia*—meaning "to stray from the path." There is a path that Jesus offers that leads to life and we stray from that path. I stray from that path everyday. Sin is the pursuit of our own self-gratification even when we know that that pursuit is wrong and may hurt others. The very worst kind of evil is the pursuit of wrong in

order to intentionally hurt others; or even a step worse is hurting other people in order to bring ourselves satisfaction. Repentance, on the other hand, means to turn back to the path. And this is going to be a regular part of life for us, even daily—straying from the path and coming back.

For this reason we are going to spend Lent concentrating on the seven deadly sins and learning to better recognize the path that leads to life—to help us make better decisions and enjoy better relationships—with God and others. We live in a culture that says, “Any path will do—follow your heart.” We don't always even recognize when we have left the path; and when we repeatedly use that other way over

and over it becomes like a sledding trail that it is hard to get out of. Identified by Christians in the fourth century, the seven deadly sins are those actions that eat away at our ability to see things clearly, appreciate things as we ought, live in healthy relationships, and refrain from destructive behaviour. Lent this year will be helping us do the necessary heart work to pull the sled out of the old rut and follow Jesus way on a new more excellent track. Understanding the anatomy of how sin works in us is our only hope because the recognition that something is wrong is the first step toward setting it right. If you're thinking right now, that "sin is not much of an issue in my life, I'm a good person," then you have been deluded. CS Lewis wrote: "It is

the devil's policy to convince us that there is no devil." Sin is the fire alarm that wakes us up to the possibility of true repentance—to take responsibility for what is wrong with the world, beginning with what is wrong with me; and to join other people who are dedicated to turning things around. Scripture and prayer light the way of this path. Today we look at the first deadly sin, **pride**, and its opposite virtue, **humility**.

Some years ago one of our neighbours moved to a newer upscale subdivision. "How do you like your new neighbourhood?" I asked one day. "It's different," Ron said. "In our old neighbourhood when something broke down—your mower, your snowblower, your car—you

just went next door and burrowed one. In our new neighbourhood, when something breaks down, you look across the fence at your neighbour's mower, snowblower, car or whatever, then you go out and buy one that's twice as expensive." That's how pride works.

Pride heads the list of deadly sins and has long been considered the seed that comes to bloom in all the other six. The medievals labelled pride as being the worst of the seven and the most persistent of our sins. The urge toward the other sins may wax and wane, but pride is a fixture in our natures. It comes early, and it stays late; it is the root of all the other sins.

It was through pride that the devil became the devil. It was with pride that the devil tested Jesus in the wilderness. CS Lewis says: "It is the complete anti-God state of mind." The tower is the common metaphor for pride: "And those who look down all the time," says Lewis, "will not look up to find God." Pride causes us to trust in ourselves rather than God. The proud person tries to hide anxiety under a blanket of self-control and by exerting power over others.

Yet pride enjoys a good reputation in our culture—redefined as a virtue. It's not a sin to have healthy self-esteem. All of us need to recognize the gifts that God has given us. Pleasure in being praised for those gifts is not pride. The parent giving their child a pat on the

back is like Jesus saying, "Well-done," to one of his followers. The trouble begins when I pass from saying, "I've done something good, all is well," to thinking, "Wow, what a fine person I must be to have done that." The more I delight in myself and the less I delight in the praise, then the more prideful I am becoming. Pride is love misapplied and perverted, when otherwise admirable self-love turns to a focus on myself that starts to make me feel like I am better than others and that I always know best. Too much self-love turns to pride.

Pride concerns excellence; most especially excelling over others. It is not enough to do your best, it must be better than others. Pride is competitive. Nearly all those evils in the world

which people put down to greed or selfishness are really far more the result of pride. Pride is why one country wants to be stronger than another, and then goes to war to prove it. Pride always means enmity—with other humans, and with God. CS Lewis said: "Pride is spiritual cancer. It eats up the very possibility of love, contentment or even common sense."

Pride is held up as a virtue in North America because consumerism depends on it. We are defined by what we buy. Pride gets no pleasure in having something, but only in having more of it, or a better quality of it than the next person. And we will even use religion to do it—like the Pharisee in today's gospel lesson who says: "God I thank you that I am not like other

people.” Comparison makes us proud. If you want to see just how proud you are, ask yourself: How much do I like it when other people snub me, or fail to take any notice of me?

Everything we know about Jesus indicates that he was concerned with only one thing: to do the will of his father. As long as I believe that "I know best," I live out of pride and I am not able to trust God. Humility is at the centre of being a Christian. Philippians says: *“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.”* Christians are called to learn how to "play second fiddle"—and this is not on the school curriculum or in the sports

team play book; yet this quality is central to our relationship to God and others. Without humility we can have no genuine relationship with God. Humility is just who Jesus is. It begins with his birth in a barn, continues in his lack of status or possessions, in his refusal of the devil's offers of power, in his washing of his disciples' feet like a common slave and most exquisitely in his death on a cross for us.

What is the first step towards humility? Admitting pride and watching for places to put ourselves in situations that humble us. How about intentionally changing your plans for someone else? How about letting others go first? How about asking someone else what they think and listening?—before launching into

what you want. How about practicing second fiddle? Humility is also our willingness to act in ways that are “other focused” and “God-focused” rather than self-focused. Humility leads to a radical openness to God whereby we allow God’s Spirit both to guide us and work through us. When we humble ourselves, God is able to work through us to do Christ’s will moving us to live from faith rather than fear, from hope rather than cynicism, from love rather than selfishness, and from God’s power rather than our own power.

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