

Emmanuel Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Pentecost 12
August 15, 2021
Sermon by Pastor Christopher Pflughoeft
Proper perspective on self

³⁰ They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, ³¹ because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise." ³² But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it. ³³ They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" ³⁴ But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. ³⁵ Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all." ³⁶ He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷ "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."

- Mark 9:30-37

Narcissistic personality disorder – According to the Mayo Clinic, Narcissistic Personality Disorder "is a mental condition in which people have an inflated sense of their own importance, a deep need for excessive attention and admiration, troubled relationships, and a lack of empathy for others. But behind this mask of extreme confidence lies a fragile self-esteem that's vulnerable to the slightest criticism." ¹ NPD results from environmental, genetic, and neurobiological factors. NPD is a mental illness that needs to be addressed with clinical counseling. NPD is rare. ²

The symptoms of NPD are like something that is not rare and that is sinful pride. Sinful pride can be diagnosed in each and every one of us. Sinful pride was seen in the disciples in the Gospel today. The treatment for sinful pride is a proper application of law and gospel.

Through the sermon text, we are confronted with the law which condemns our sinful pride. We hear the gospel which proclaims the truth of our identity in Jesus. Today, we gain **a proper perspective of self**.

As we engage in a discussion on the **proper perspective of self**. We have a necessary starting point. This is found in the opening of the text. Here, Jesus and his disciples passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know about this because he had an important task. Jesus needed to teach his disciples. Jesus needed to teach his disciples the core truth of the gospel. This is what Jesus said, "*The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill him. But three days after he is killed, he will rise.*" Jesus needed to tell them the basic truths of his death and resurrection. At this moment, the disciples did not yet understand this truth. Although they did not understand it, this is the truth through which one is redeemed.

Doing things in the right order is important. Perhaps you are familiar with the saying, "don't put the cart before the horse." This can be a throw away phrase, but it is meaningful. We cannot understand our Christian identity apart from the message of Jesus' death and resurrection. A proper perspective of self for a Christian is that of being redeemed.

So, let's talk about your perspective on yourself. Do you have a proper understanding of who you are in this world as a Christian? Many times, Christians can look out into the world and think, "I sure am glad that I am not like those people." They look at the gross amount of sin in this world; homosexuality, drunkenness, murder, and the like, and are amazed. This is right in one sense; we should be disgusted by sin. We should also call it out. But the problem comes in from our sinful pride. Why does God love you? Is it because you aren't like the people of this world? No. The truth is God loved you when you were still like them. "*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*" (Romans 5:8) So, do you view yourself as more deserving of God's love than others? Do you look at the world and think, "Well, I'd never!?" If so, your perspective of yourself is off. That is sinful pride being shown. Be careful with that distorted view of self. Pride is a wicked sin. Hear what is recorded in the Proverbs, "*To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech.*" (Proverbs 8:13) People of Emmanuel, do not mess around with sinful pride, God hates pride just as he hates all those sins that you see out in the world.

Truly, your worth in God's eyes is found in Christ Jesus. Listen again what he did for you, "*The Son of Man (was) betrayed into the hands of men, and they kill(ed) him. But three days after he (was) killed, he r(ose).*" Since Jesus died and rose, you know that you are forgiven for your sinful pride. Now, you can have **a proper perspective of self**. You are a redeemed child of God.

We can further see a **proper perspective of self** through this lesson when Jesus and his disciples arrive in Capernaum. On the road, Jesus' disciples had a discussion. In their discussion, they quarreled about who was the greatest among them. This seems to be a silly conversation to have, but this is not uncommon. It is not uncommon for people to look at themselves and view themselves as greater than others. Jesus then continues to teach his disciples how sinful and wrong their arrogance was. This is what Jesus said to them, "*If anyone wants to be first, he will be the last of all.*" Jesus taught his disciples the importance of humility. **A proper perspective of self** is to view yourself as below other people. It is to be humble. The disciples gave off a false vail of humility in not wanting people to know about their prideful argument. **The proper perspective of self** is not false humility, but to be truly humble.

Have you ever heard a humblebrag? A humblebrag is when a person, whether well intentioned or not, presents a prideful boast as humility. (Information is from a blog on Grammarly, accessed at <https://www.grammarly.com/blog/what-is-humblebrag/>) Here are some examples of humblebrags: "I wish that I had your confidence. I can never leave my house unless I'm all made-up." "I wish I was as naturally talented as you are. I have to work so hard for everything I have." "I wish I could work a manual job like you do. My job is just so stressful with all the important decisions I have to make." See how these humblebrags work? The first statement is saying, "I look good when I leave the house." The second says, "I work harder than you." The third, "My work is more important than yours." This is false humility. These humblebrags hide one's pride. This is like how the disciples tried to hide their pride. **The proper perspective of self** is not false humility, but to be truly humble.

I think this one hits home for us. I think this is a sin that many Christians struggle with. We know that being prideful is wrong. We know it is sin. So, what do we do? We try to conceal our pride. Instead of "*do(ing) nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit... in humility valu(ing) others above (y)ourselves,*" (Philippians 2:3) we just hide the selfish ambition and vain conceit. Being prideful and then hiding the sin, does not make things okay. Rather, we are compounding the sin. Hiding sin just results from pride. Sinful pride thinks it is better that people don't know about your sin. It is not. Concealing your pride and other sinful actions would lead to damnation. A person could reject their salvation and appear to be a humble person with a **proper perspective of self**.

Brothers and sisters, if you are guilty of sinful pride, do not cover it up with a vail of false humility. Rather, look to Jesus Christ who was truly humble for you. This is what Jesus did for you, "*being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!*" Yes, Jesus was truly humble for you. He humbled himself to the law. He submitted himself to death on a cross. The Father sent His Son, the Son lived humbly and died for you, the Holy Spirit worked faith in your heart to believe this message. You are forgiven for your pride and trying to hide it. You will live forever in heaven. Now, you can hear Jesus' instructions and be truly humble with a **proper perspective of self**.

The final aspect of a **proper perspective of self** that we gain from this text is to view yourself as a servant. Here Jesus explicitly tells the disciples to view themselves as servants. He then demonstrates what he means. He goes to a child. Now, don't understand this in a modern way in which children are the future and more important than anyone. In their day, children were seen as lowly. So, Jesus directs them to a lowly person, saying "*Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me. And whoever welcomes me, welcomes not just me but also him who sent me.*" Jesus instructs his disciples that if they serve lowly people, they are really serving God. **The proper perspective of self** is to view yourself as a servant.

Because of our society and pride, servant almost sounds like a bad word. People don't want to be servants. They want to be served. Being a servant is not a bad thing. It is a wonderful thing to serve. In my opinion, the consummate example of a godly servant is a mother. She stays up all night for her child. Feeds the child with her body. Puts that child's needs above her own. What a wonderful example of Christian service mothers are. So, **the proper perspective of self** is to look at oneself compared to others as a mother does to her children. Then act as a servant.

So, do you serve others? How about the lowly? Are you willingly to do hard things purely for the benefit of others? Are you willing to subject your actions to the will of God and serve the least of these? Being honest, we fail to do this. We all have, at times, been selfish in our actions. In your life, if you take actions with only your own benefit in mind, no matter what action or situation, that is not a **proper perspective of self**, that is not welcoming Jesus and the Father who sent him, that is sin.

Again, what is the solution to the problem brought by this prideful sin? Look to Jesus. Look to how Jesus serving you, died on the cross. On the cross, he forgave your sin. Also, look to Jesus' action. Think about on Maundy Thursday Jesus washed other people's feet. That was not just Jesus setting a good example for you. That is Jesus' righteousness. That is Jesus living as a true servant in your place fulfilling the demands for you to serve. In Jesus Christ, you are truly forgiven. Through Jesus Christ, you have life eternal. Now, he continues to serve you through His Word and Sacrament. Through the means of grace, the Holy Spirit has given life to you. Now, you can live with **the proper perspective** of self as a servant.

The proper treatment for narcissistic personality disorder is psychotherapy. The way to address sinful pride is law and gospel. We heard this today. In this Gospel, we gain **a proper perspective of self**. When we are proud, this is sin. Jesus redeemed us through his humble life and his servant's death. Now, let us live as his **redeemed, humble servants**. Amen.

¹ Information is from the Mayo Clinic, accessed at <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/narcissistic-personality-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20366662>

² Information is from the Mayo Clinic, accessed at <https://www.google.com/search?q=narcissistic+personality+disorder&oq=narcis&aqs=chrome.69i59j69i57j0i433i512i4j69i60j2.1846j0j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>