

February 6, 2022
The Fifth Sunday after Epiphany
Pastor Matt Duerr

“Wake Up Leaders and...”

Grace mercy and peace be to you from God our Father from my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. Epiphany means to make manifest, make known. We've been talking about humility, making known what humility looks like in the church. And last week in particular with dads. Dads are to display humble leadership in the home. One look at today's sermon title, “Wake up leaders and...” probably gives you an idea of where we're going this week with humility.

Leadership in the church, the elder, the pastor (who biblically is the teaching elder), deacons, trustees, council members, board members, etc. How does humility relate to them? You might have noticed that up till now haven't actually given a definition of humility. Here's the definition I like: “a quality, attitude or feeling of no self-importance that would make one better than another.” That definition, it's very biblical and it carries with it the idea of modesty. Now what is modesty? It's not referring to clothing. Clothing is a part of modesty. Modesty is not drawing attention to one's self. It's the we versus the I. The second is meekness. What is meekness? Not demanding your own way. And when you put together those ideas of modesty and meekness, the result is sweetness. A modest meek person is a sweet person. It is someone who is pleasant to be around. The ecclesiastical Latin root for humility has its foundation in earth, earthiness, or surprise, surprise, dirt. That takes us back to that first sermon, doesn't it? What it doesn't mean is walking around in sackcloth and ashes for all to see; or having that humble, you know, sort of image of flinching at anything that comes your way. No both can be taken to draw attention to oneself again.

Humility begins with a recognition of our indebtedness to God. Because He is the author and finisher of life, and He is the author and finisher of faith. When it comes to life and faith, there is no ‘I did that,’ in either one. Through Christ we read in John 1 “all things were made that were made.” So literally, our life, our existence here on the earth, began with Christ. And through His resurrection from the dead, we have

eternal life. So truly, God is the author and finisher of life. But the same can be said about our faith. It is faith worked by the Holy Spirit who calls us through the gospel. Without the Holy Spirit, we'd be doomed and so there's that recognition of our indebtedness to God for everything.

And when it comes to leaders, it includes with that an acute awareness that all they have is a gift from God, an acute awareness that all they do is dependent on His grace, and as a result humility leads to patience and leads to the two-pronged biggy! Living out humility involves imitating good examples and that first problem is that leadership in the church needs to follow biblical examples of humility. Meet Joseph. In our Old Testament reading this morning from Genesis 50. We've already heard that when he interpreted Pharaoh's dreams before he did, and after he did it, he gave all the credit to God. But now let's take a look at his life and the setting for chapter 50. His father Jacob, who God renamed Israel, had died and his brothers were afraid that Joseph would take revenge on them, so they came to him you just word and he said to them; "you meant for me evil in all that they had done."

Well, what had they done? His ten older brothers wanted to kill him. But the oldest brother talked them out of that, and they sold him instead into slavery to their relatives the Ishmaelites, who took him from the Promised Land to Egypt and sold him to an Egyptian named Potiphar who was the captain of the guard. Now that means he either was the captain of the army of Egypt, which is a rather high-ranking position, or he was the captain of Pharaoh's guard; the equivalent of being the head of the Secret Service. So, either way, he was a big dog and he served Potiphar faithfully because that's what God would want him to do. As a result, Potiphar made him overseer of his house; and I quote: "put him in charge of all that he had." There was one problem for Joseph. He was a good looking young man and Potiphar's wife saw that; I believe if we look carefully in the Hebrew there her last name began with a K; and was something like Kardashian. I'll go no further down that road, other than to say she wanted to have an affair with Joseph.

But Joseph understood the concept of stewardship that we talked about last week. That a steward is not the owner but a caretaker. And

so, because of his faith, first of all in God, and because of his role as a steward, a caretaker; he said, 'no way.' Well I'm sure you've heard there's nothing like the anger of a woman who has been scorned, and she was angry and she accused him of attempted rape. Potiphar had him arrested and thrown into prison without any trial. In prison, Joseph continued to live the way God would want him to live. The head of the prison, the warden, noticed this and he began to give Joseph jobs. Joseph did them well and he eventually became the overseer, the caretaker, the steward of everybody in the prison. And the warden had no cares. It was during this time that Pharaoh's Baker and Butler came, that he interpreted their dreams. The Baker died, the Butler lived, was restored to Pharaoh. But Joseph had asked him to 'remember me when you are restored to Pharaoh' and the Butler forgot. He forgot for two years. It was after two years that Pharaoh had his dream that Joseph interpreted it, that he was made the steward, a caretaker of Egypt.

When the famine arose and his family came from afar, that he took them in, he welcomed them, he negotiated with Pharaoh, got them the land of Goshen, and all went well for his family until his dad Jacob-Israel died. And his brothers remembered what they had done, and I think what is key here is this they were thinking with their minds not the mind of Joseph. In their minds, had anyone done to them, what they had done to their brother Joseph, they would seek revenge and kill. But Joseph forgave and that's why he said, "what you meant for me as evil, God meant for good." Joseph was way ahead of his time. He already understood what Saint Paul writes in Romans that all things work together for good for those who love the Lord and are called according to His purpose. And so Joseph explained; 'what you meant for evil, God meant for good,' and because of this I can now provide for you and for your family so you don't die in the famine. And not only can I provide for you, through this God is continuing our lineage so that our family can go back to the Promised Land and the Messiah can come through us. It's obvious this is all meant for good!

Remember the patience thing? How much patience do you think Joseph had on the road to Egypt? At Potiphar's house? In the prison? Dealing with his family? He was patient. We never read that he was annoyed or angry. And so in our biblical imitation leaders of the church

need to understand that humility is the key but the fruit of humility, patience, along with modesty and meekness and sweetness is key. We might sometimes get annoyed, we might even feel like we're angry. But that's when we need to be like Joseph and step back and say how is God working here to bring about good? Because it cannot be about me when it comes to being a leader in the church, it is always about them.

So last week I gave you the hierarchy for dads. God's number one, wife and family number two, dad you're number three. When it comes to being a leader in the church, you must understand your position. God is number one. His family, the body of Christ, the church is number two. Your wife and family are three, and you come in at a powerful fourth, last place. Because prong number two, as you imitate the Bible, others see you and will follow what you do. Your life is a validation of the biblical examples that you imitate. And understand members, you're not off the hook. Number one, you need to understand that the leadership in the church has volunteered to be number four, has volunteered to take the Bible seriously and imitate what they see in the best of the Bible. And so that demands that you understand that. And then support them, respect them, and faithfully pray for the leadership in your church. And then number two, you imitate them to your family, and to the society, the community around you.

And then together leadership, members, the laity, the body of Christ; we become like John the Baptist. Who in our gospel this morning had his disciples come to him and say 'Jesus, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness, look he's baptizing and all are going to him in other words everybody is leaving our church John and they're going to Jesus church.' And his response is so beautiful. He comes back almost in a parable fashion, saying you know when a man finds his wife, and he becomes the groom, the best man does not look at the groom and say, 'Gee I wish I was you.' No, he is so happy for his best friend that he has found love in his life. He is filled with joy. And John says, 'now my joy, this joy is mine, is now complete.' But he then takes a step further and says, 'He Jesus, must increase, I must decrease.'

And that is a lesson for all of us especially for the leadership in a church. We must take a back seat to Christ, to the body of Christ, the

church, and to your own personal family. And what's that look like? Well as members, and new members, and visitors come and stumble along because let's be honest, as a church, we don't want to be taking from other churches. We want to be catching the wild trout out there, people who don't know Jesus. And when they come in, they're going to have questions. They might stumble along the way, and we can't get annoyed; oh stupid newbie. We can't get angry; 'what are you thinking? What are you doing?' You have the patience of Joseph, and we walk along with them as they take those baby steps of faith and grow. But we need to be ready at the same time to answer the questions that they have to know why we believe what we believe and why we do what we do. And then when we see growth, like Joseph, like John, we rejoice. Even if it's the tiniest, tiniest growth.

I had a terrible algebra teacher in 8th grade. And maybe honestly, it was because I was a terrible student. I didn't like her at all I had to retake algebra in my freshman year in high school. My teacher was Mr. Specter. He was also the football coach. I think I must have driven Mr. Specter up the wall for the first several classes because as he was trying to teach algebra. He'd ask, are there any questions, boom, my hand was up. And basically, here was my roadblock in algebra. Numbers are numbers, one and one makes two. That makes sense to me. Letters are English. I don't like English. The rules are too confusing. I don't like adverbs, verbs and all of that kind of stuff. So how can I now have math where you say $a + b = C$? That makes no sense. And finally Mr. Specter stopped one day and he said, 'Duerr, 'do you know what a teeter totter is? Yes I do. OK let me draw one here, it's a line on the board then I'll put a triangle right in the middle of it, do you know what this little triangle is? I said, Oh yeah, that's a fulcrum. Good I thought you'd know that. And so if I put one here on this side, and I put two here, what's gonna happen to the teeter totter? Well it's gonna go down on the two side. Why because you have more over there. What would I have to do to make it come up? Well you have to put another one on the other side because $1 + 1 = 2$ so they're equal right? The fulcrum is the equal sign so if I put an A over here and I put a C over here, and I then have a B here, and I tell you A&B together, these two letters they are equal to C because C is a big letter, can you accept that just for a moment? Oh yeah sure. So in terms of A and B&C, what is A equal to? Well, you'd have to take the B away, and

put it over on the other side as a negative B, so A would be $C - B$. Oh there Duerr, you just did algebra. And my gosh that's it. It's just the teeter totter? And he was so happy. I was so happy! And then he did something that made me feel so good. He said how many of you in here right now, algebra just made sense to you? There were seven or eight hands that went up, so I didn't feel alone. And then he said, and then for those of you who the last couple of weeks have been rolling your eyes and stuff when whenever Duerr was asking questions, let's see how well you do this quarter and through this year and see if you actually get better grades than he does. Because my experience is that when someone catches it like this, they end up being one of the best students. Wow! It was from Mr. Specter I learned one of the basic principles of teaching. It's something he said, understand that for a teacher there is no such thing as a bad question.

And leaders of the church, understand that, when it comes to the Bible, and our faith, there is no such thing as a bad question. Always be prepared to give an account for the hope that we have and do it with gentleness and respect. Then rejoice in the baby steps that we see. And members, remember there's no such thing as a bad question. When it comes to the Bible and faith but there are bad questions when you start to question the integrity of the leadership in the church that is doing their best to imitate what they see in the Bible. Together may we grow, may we learn, supporting members, supporting leaders, because together we are the body of Christ. In our Savior's Name. Amen