Proverbs 25:6-7 (EHV)  
GOD LOVES HUMILITY  
1. Be in Christ’s humility  
2. God will exalt you  

People like to brag. It is human nature. Parents like to brag about their children. Fans like to brag about their team. The list can go on, but I think you get the point.

Our culture promotes bragging. Businesses are looking for self-confident, self-assured go-getters. They want you to convince them why they should hire you instead of the next guy. Watch some reality TV show or NFL game and it does not take you long to see what I mean.

The idea that we need to be self-promoting does not limit itself to the work place. The sinful human heart is constantly trying to build itself up to be someone important. It especially wants to do this before God. You know the thought: God, I deserve better than this. I come to church all the time, even on holidays. I give much more in the offering plate than others. How come you don't bless me like so and so who never comes to church? Our corrupted hearts think that they have to build themselves up before God, showing that they have earned the right for God to listen and bless them. But, as all our lessons for today show, such thinking is the exact opposite of what is true.

God loves humility. Be in Christ's humility, and God will exalt you.

Our sermon text is taken from the book of Proverbs and was written by the wisest man that ever lived: King Solomon. Being a king, Solomon was certainly an expert in how to find favor with a ruler. But Solomon's words are more than just practical advice as how to find favor with those in positions of power. The same thing can also be said about our Gospel lesson. When Jesus offered the advice to take the lowest place at a dinner, he offered far more than practical advice as how to find honor in society. No, both Solomon and Jesus want to teach a greater spiritual truth - how we find true honor before God.

God cannot stand those who exalt themselves. Consider the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector Jesus told on another occasion: Two men went up to the temple courts to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed about himself like this: God, I thank you that I am not like other people, robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week. I give a tenth of all my income. However the tax collector stood at a distance and would not even lift his eyes up to heaven, but was beating his chest and saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner! I tell you, this man went home justified rather than the other, because everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.

Self-promotion gets you nowhere with God. Actually, it results in just the opposite. Consider Jesus' remarks about those who brag about the things they did in God's name as reason to get to heaven. Jesus once said: Many will say to me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and drive out demons in your name and perform many miracles in your name? Then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you. depart from me, you evildoers.

The point is clear: God hates those who brag, those who feel like they deserve God's favor in any way shape or form.

Now we might be tempted to think: This is a good text for my Catholic neighbors to take to heart. Aren't they always trying to earn God's favor through their good works? We Lutherans, on the other hand, live by grace. We do not trust our works to save us. My answer is: Really? Let us be honest with ourselves. Have you never wondered why God did not bless you like he blessed someone else? Have you never thought in your heart: I'm a
good Christian. Don’t I deserve this thing I am praying for? Maybe you never expressed these thoughts in your prayers, but you certainly have thought them in your hearts. Any Christian who claims otherwise is a liar.

No, we are guilty as charged when it comes to thinking we deserve God’s blessings. God sees our hearts. He knows what goes on inside of them. Lord, have mercy on us sinners.

And praying for mercy - as the tax collector did in the temple - is exactly where God wants us. He wants us confessing our sins and unworthiness. He wants us acknowledging that we deserve nothing - that everything we have and are is a gift of his undeserved love. He wants us clothed in Christ's humility.

Do you want proof that God loves humility? Than look no further than Philippians 2 and the example of Christ. Paul writes: Indeed, let this attitude be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. Though he was by nature God, he did not consider equality with God as a prize to be displayed, but he emptied himself by taking the nature of a servant. When he was born in human likeness, and his appearance was like that of any other man, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross. Jesus had it all. He was with God. He was God. And yet what did Jesus do out of love for us? He humbled himself. He became a weak human just like us. He even went further than that: he took all our sins upon himself and became obedient to death on the cross. The master of all became the servant of all. He, righteousness personified, became sin personified so that he could suffer and die for all our sins.

In the presence of his Father - in the presence of the King of kings - Jesus lowered himself. And what did God say in response to this? Come up here, my Son. As Paul writes: Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Now let’s be clear. The example of Jesus' humility is more than just an example for us to follow. It is the very humility we need to stand before God. What I mean is this: the sinful heart does not want to approach God in humility. It does not want to acknowledge its total corruption and need for forgiveness.

God demands perfection. God demands payment for sin. We cannot even begin to offer God these things, but Jesus can and does. Unlike what our hearts are inclined to do, Jesus did not stand in judgment over God’s laws and say: Hey God, these things do not make sense. They do not fit with today’s culture. No, he humbled himself and was obedient to all of God’s law for us - confessing that God’s law is good and right.

Unlike us, Jesus did not moan and complain about how unfair life is, how we deserve better. No, he submitted to all the unfair suffering God sent his way. He trusted God that it would serve our salvation and glorify God’s name. He was punished in our place. He made perfect payment for our sins.

Our humility and confession would be meaningless if Jesus had not humbled himself for us. This is why I said we need to be in Christ’s humility.

What does it mean to stand before God in Christ’s humility? It means to stand before God clothed with Christ - trusting in him alone for salvation.

How exactly do we enter into Christ's humility? First of all by realizing in sorrow that we have sinned against God and deserve nothing from him. It is to confess with Isaiah: All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags. Like the tax collector in the temple, we beat our breast in sorrow and say: God, be merciful to me a sinner!
And that leads me to the next point: we enter into Christ's humility by trusting that God is merciful and will forgive our sins for Christ's sake. To enter Christ's humility is to be clothed with Christ through faith. When God the Father looks at a believer, he sees his Son. And what does God do? With his Son he lifts us up, declaring us to be his children and heirs of eternal life. He exalts us to be royal priests and kings to rule with Jesus. Sharing in Christ’s humility results in sharing in Christ's exaltation, as Jesus says: If anyone serves me, let him follow me. And where I am, there my servant will be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

Following Jesus in humility also has another result. It means that we will act humbly towards others, as Scripture says: Do nothing out of selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility consider one another better than yourselves. Let each of you look carefully not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Let this attitude be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.

Christianity is not a competition against other Christians - trying to see who can win a better spot in heaven. No, following Christ means that we will work together with fellow brothers and sisters in the faith, as Jesus himself says: This is my command: Love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this: that someone lays down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you continue to do the things I instruct you. These things I am instructing you, so that you love one another.

And this love for each other will express itself in submissiveness and humility - as the Scriptures say: Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for, as Peter writes: G opposes the proud, but he gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourselves under God’s powerful hand so that he may lift you up at the appointed time. cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.

How should you approach God? Should you come before him thinking you are better than other Christians? Should you complain about your situation in life and think that you deserve better from God? This is no way for sinners to approach the King of kings. As James writes: Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he will lift you up. Through repentance and faith, clothe yourself with Christ’s humility, and God, for Christ’s sake, will exalt you with Christ to the heights of heaven. Amen.

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