

Homily – Let's Get Rid of Hubris

The Rev. Rob Keim

August 28th, 2022 – St. Barnabas Episcopal Church

Today's word of the day is pride. P-R-I-D-E. The word pride is used three times in our Old Testament reading from the Book of Sirach and along with humility, pride is the unnamed topic or emotion of our Gospel reading. And, along with hubris, these are the emotions I want to look at today.

If you want to be swept away by a sea of inspirational quotes then Google pride and humility. From Bible verses to the worst 1980s corporate motivational posters, everyone seems to have an opinion about the importance of humility and the dangerous nature of pride. You don't see too many inspirational quotes about hubris but if you search political news articles over the last decade you'll be swallowed whole. But here's the thing. Most of the quotes that show up in the Google search have it wrong. For you see, pride is a feeling of pleasure or celebration related to our accomplishments or efforts. Hubris is an inflated sense of one's own innate abilities.

And, humility is openness to new learning combined with a balanced and accurate assessment of our contribution. Let's look at each of these emotions in a little more depth.

Hubris and pride are very different emotions. Perhaps to distinguish between them we should call the pride we experience when we've accomplished something as authentic pride. Authentic pride typically has a positive connotation, and descriptors of authentic pride include words like accomplishment, mastery, triumph, confidence, and self-worth. Authentic pride is positively associated with self-esteem and negatively associated with proneness to shame. And, we don't just feel pride about our own accomplishments, there is a family of pride experiences. I can feel proud about myself, proud about you, and even proud about us. But there is also another common way that we think about pride. People commonly say things like "pride got in the way", for example when someone fresh out of college turns down a job that they feel overqualified for. Or we might say "he was too proud to accept help" for example when a single dad is struggling financially and turns down his parents offer of a temporary loan. However, in general authentic pride is a feeling of pleasure or celebration related to our accomplishments and efforts.

On the other hand, hubris is an inflated sense of one's own innate abilities that is tied more to the need for dominance than to actual accomplishments. Hubris is negatively correlated with self-esteem and positively correlated with narcissism and proneness to shame. In simpler terms, the higher the hubris, the lower the self-esteem, and the higher the hubris, the higher the narcissism. Dominance, which is a

type of status that is coerced through aggression or intimidation, plays a significant role in hubris. Hubristic pride may have evolved to motivate behaviors, thoughts, and feelings oriented toward attaining dominance, whereas authentic pride may have evolved to motivate behaviors, thoughts, and feelings oriented toward attaining prestige. Prestige status is earned. Prestige based leaders are admired for their skills or knowledge, as distinct from dominance status, which is obtained by force.

And as I mentioned a moment ago hubris is positively correlated with narcissism. Everything from Facebook to increasingly insane behavior of politicians has pushed the term narcissism into the zeitgeist. We can recognize the narcissist by a pattern of behavior that includes grandiosity, a pervasive need for admiration, and a lack of empathy. However, most of us don't realize that the narcissists is actually driven by shame. In fact narcissism is shame-based fear of being ordinary.

And here's something I learned during the ordination process while becoming a priest. Preachers need to have at least a low-dose of narcissism. Preachers need to feel confident that they have something to say, something that others need to hear or learn about. So maybe a low dose of narcissism is needed in certain professions. So today we are looking at authentic pride, hubris and its associated narcissism, and humility. Humility is an openness to new learning combined with a balanced and accurate assessment of one's own contributions, including our strengths, imperfections, and opportunities for growth. We can sum up humility with one sentence. I'm here to get it right not to be right.

So, we can leave behind the ideas that hubris is just a benign form of supersize pride, that pride is bad for us, and that humility is weakness. Pride can be good for us, hubris is dangerous, and humility is key to grounded confidence and healthy relationships.

Now, if you have heard me preach about emotions over the last few months then you know that I have been using Brené Brown's book, "Atlas of the Heart" to help us better understand a wide range of emotions. When we can name and understand our emotions, then we are aided in our spiritual journeys and draw closer to God. Conversely, when our emotions are misunderstood and not even recognized then they rule us. Unmanaged emotions are like fuel on a fire, it feeds the false self and ego and separates us from God.

We all, every single one of us, have ego work to do to let go of our false self. And this ego work falls into three general categories. We all need to let go of an excessive need for affection and approval. We all need to let go of an excessive need for control and manage our anger. And, we all need to let go of a disproportionate need for security and manage our fears. Today, as our scripture readings lead us to examine the emotions of pride, hubris, and humility we are going to do a deeper

dive into the ego work need to let go of an excess need for affection and approval. What can we do to decrease hubris and increase humility? And, the answer is to have a bit less deceit and a bit more honesty in our lives.

Deceit is the action or practice of misleading someone by concealing or misrepresenting the truth. When we think of deceit, we tend to fixate on the lie, what it is or whether it's a big deal. But deceit actually has very little to do with the lie and everything to do with what the truth is. To misrepresent something is often easier than we realize.

Hearing the word deceit in correlation to your personality and ego might send you into full defensive mode, and understandably so. After all, as the story tells us, it was deceit that was used in the garden of Eden to cause the fall of human beings. Deceit is a touchy topic. You may be thinking, "but I never purposefully lie to people." You may be thinking, "deceit is never a word I used to describe myself. I pride myself in being honest and open with others." All of these things may be true. However, I'd like to propose that if you replace the word deceit with the phrase people pleasing, then it might feel a little more accurate. So, are you a people pleaser? We don't normally intentionally deceive people, but rather we form a habit of misrepresenting ourselves in order to please others and come across more confident than we are. Even if this is not malicious, even if others never know about it, and even if it's somewhat socially acceptable, this is still deceit. Sometimes the heart is so tender toward people that we may try to be what they want us to be, even if we're not. That is why our deceit doesn't always feel gross, ugly, or harmful. Sometimes our deceit feels like how we love. However, you don't need to hide who you are in order to love others. That is the lie of the ego that leads to hubris. That is the way of the people pleaser. Instead, focus on pleasing God.

And, there are two reasons God wants us to focus on pleasing God, and not humans. First, God is the only source of true and lasting joy, peace, comfort, and salvation. Second, people are fickle, and pleasing them is a fruitless endeavor. God wants us to focus on what matters and not waste our precious days on chasing the wind of popular opinion. God is calling for us to live without anxiety and fear of other people. When we get caught up in the temptation of deceit, especially when it comes to protecting our image, then it leads to hubris and away from humility.

Now, we often feel that if people are happy with us, then God must be happy too, so we justify working for the applause of others. But God wants your identity to be your true self, your real self. In this way we reveal the immortal diamond God has already created within you. This is when you lean into the Christ that is already inside you and all around you. In this way Jesus is our model and teacher. Jesus reflects the call to a radical honesty. He fully surrendered to God's will, so he always made choices in alignment with that and never once was deceitful. When Jesus was

radically honest, he connected with people as they were right where they were. He never came from any agenda except finding a way to connect others with God's truth. With radical honesty, there is no hidden agenda or desire to manipulate for an intended outcome, especially an outcome that makes one look better than one actually is. This attitude is radical because it's genuinely humble and not self-seeking. Radical honesty comes from meekness and being truly authentic. It shares your humanity, your imperfections, and your limitations, along with your dreams and desires. There is nothing more transformational than confessing when you see where you've been acting deceitfully and living into hubris and narcissism. When you are honest with those impacted by your deceit, you may begin to restore what wasn't working.

This is all heavy stuff. It can be easier to point to what others are getting wrong. As hard as it is to believe, it may even be easier to watch the negative stuff on the nightly news rather than look in the mirror and reflect on our own hubris, narcissism, and deceit. However, if you take a serious look, and make a serious commitment to change, then you can reveal what is underneath. You have Christ within you, but you have some work to do to reveal it once again. I assure you, the work is worth it. And, God is with you in that work.