

"Not 'I,' but Jesus"

Text: Proverbs 25:6-7

10/8/1027

There's a saying that's often used, especially by athletes, that speaks to the importance of everybody working together for a team to be successful; it goes like this: "There's no **I** in 'team.'" That saying speaks simply and directly to the fact that, for a team to be successful, none of its individuals can afford to get too wrapped-up in themselves. To become focused on the individual is to have the team suffer.

That truth is conveyed in today's Scripture readings (all of them), as God's Word tells us today to NOT think too highly of ourselves, or assert our own individual worth. Instead we are to defer to others and assert their worth - which we do when we love them. For us Christians, life isn't about "I." It's about "you" (point to them). Ultimately, life is about Jesus. We learn that in particular from today's O.T. Lesson, to which we now turn our attention ...

Today's O. T. Lesson says this:

"Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of great men, for it is better to be told: 'Come up here,' than to be put lower in the presence of a noble."(Proverbs 25:6- 7)

Those words come to us from the book of Proverbs, and they were written some time during the reign of King Solomon, by King Solomon himself. The book of Proverbs is usually attributed to Solomon, and that is appropriate, given that all but 4 y§ of its 31 chapters are thought to have been penned by him.

Solomon reigned over God's people Israel, succeeding the reign of King David in the years 970-930 B.C., and during most of that time Israel experienced peace and abundant prosperity. A lot of that was due to Solomon, who early on in his reign had asked the Lord for wisdom, saying to Him:

" ... (Lord) You have made Your servant king in place of my father David, yet I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in ... give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?"(1 Kings 3:7, 9)

After that we're told that God said to Solomon:

"Because you have asked this thing .. I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you."(vs. 11-12)

Much of that wise and discerning heart of Solomon is preserved for us in the book of Proverbs.

It's interesting that the words of today's O.T. Lesson, though attributed to Solomon, owe their inclusion in the book of Proverbs to King Hezekiah, as it says in the first verse of the chapter from which today's lesson comes to us (chapter 25 of Proverbs):

"These also are proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah, King of Judah, transcribed."

It seems that King Hezekiah found these words of Solomon while rummaging around in the Temple archives, or some other similar source of the time, having his scribes then include them in a copy of Proverbs which they had available to them. I say that's interesting because King Hezekiah reigned over Judah during the years 715-686 B.C., which means the words of today's lesson would've dated anywhere from *200- 250 years prior* to the time of Hezekiah. Apparently Solomon had written these words of Proverbs 25 over two centuries before, *and they got lost!*, and remained lost for over 200 years. But God preserved these words, under the careful eye of the godly King Hezekiah, and we benefit from their blessing today.

And what is that blessing? It's the blessing of humility. Solomon speaks quite extensively about humility throughout the book of Proverbs; for example, he says in 16:18-19:

"Pride goeth before the fall, and a haughty spirit before destruction. It is better to be of a lowly spirit (i.e., humble) with the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud."

and also:

"Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, but humility goes before honor."(18: 12)

"Humility goes before honor," Solomon says, and he's right. I cannot begin to tell you how many times I've stuck out my chest in an attempt to assert my worth, only to have it sunk back in again with a blow to my gut. Pride *does go before* the fall folks, and it *is* better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor. Humility *does go before* honor, and if you try and honor yourself you'll be *dishonored* every time. Solomon's words are just as true today as they were when he first penned them almost 3,000 years ago:

"Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence ... "

If you do, you might end up being removed. Do NOT honor yourself, folks. If you do, you'll regret it.

Now, this speaks to all of us as sinful people. It's something we all struggle with, because we're all sinners. In fact, it hit me just recently what the true nature of sin is: selfishness - sin causes us all to want to, in Solomon's words, "put (ourselves) forward in the king's presence." We want to honor ourselves, and that gets us into trouble. I say all the time, to those I catechize, that the spelling of the word "sin" gives us a clue to its true nature, because the middle letter of the word 'sin' is "I." Being the middle letter of the word "sin," the letter "I" really gets to the center *I* heart-and-soul of what sin is: I want what I want, when I want it, the way I want it, and not you nor anybody else better get in the way of that. "Sin" is an "I-word," and that's what I am about: me. And so are you. That's what it means to say that we're sinners - we're all consumed with . ourselves - our "I"s. Luther would say it all comes down to the First Commandment: We all want to be our own god.

That's NOT o.k. with the true God. And so Jesus says in today's Gospel:

" ... do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited ... , and he who invited you both will come and say to you: 'Give your place to this person,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place ... Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."(Luke 14:8-9, 11)

Do NOT let your "I" get too big for your britches, Jesus seems to say. If you do, you'll end up having them yanked off in shame.

We Christians have NOT been called to shame, but to honor. *And we get honor FROM JESUS.* St. Paul writes in today's Epistle that we are to:

" ... walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you (we) have been called, *with all HUMILITY* and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ... "(Ephesians 4: 1-2)

That sounds like Jesus, for Jesus walked in a manner of humility and gentleness when He patiently bore in love for us a cross, on which He answered for all the times we fail to be gentle and humble ourselves. As St. Paul says, our Lord:

" ... humbled Himself by becoming obedient unto death, even death on a cross."(Philippians 2:8)

Think about it folks: when Jesus died on the cross, was He focused on Himself? Of course not. In fact, He wouldn't have been there if He was. Not only that, but recall the actual words He spoke from the cross ... how many of them had anything at all to do with Himself? Let's review them here ...

- 1) "Father, forgive them, ... "
- 2) "Woman, behold your Son, ... "
- 3) "Today, you will ... "
- 4) "My God, My God, why ... "
- 5) "I thirst." 6) "It is finished." 7) "Father, into Your ... "

Only #5 had anything at all to do with Jesus Himself, and there He spoke words that fulfilled the Words of the O.T:

"They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink."(Psalm 69:21)

Those words are from a prayer of a man (David) who is focused on God's deliverance in time of trouble. So even when Jesus speaks with regard to Himself, He's focused on God and His deliverance.

Unlike us, Jesus kept the First Commandment, having no other gods than the one true God, *even in death* focusing on God's plan to deliver us. Mindful of that, Paul goes on to say that:

"For this reason (the reason of Jesus' humble death for our sins) God highly exalted Him, and gave Him the Name that is above every name, that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow ..."
(Philippians 2:9-10)

Jesus was honored by God, *because He dishonored Himself* in sacrificial service of us. On the Last Day He'll be honored by the whole world, when every knee bows in honor of Him.

Which means that honor - true honor, in the eyes of God - isn't something we earn, or deserve; it's something we receive, as a gift God's gift to us in His Son. Don't honor yourself, folks. *Receive* honor today *as a gift*, by faithfully eating & drinking the Body & Blood of your Lord. Remember that life is NOT about "I," or you, or any of us. Life us about Jesus. Remember that and you'll be honored-you'll be honored to be in the presence of the King.

Which brings us back to our text from Proverbs 25, where we hear again its admonition to:

"Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of great men, for it is better to be told: 'Come up here,' than to be put lower in the presence of a noble."

Solomon speaks there against being prideful another word with I in the middle of it - pride), and he speaks against pride elsewhere in Proverbs when he says:

"When pride comes, then comes dishonor, but with the humble is wisdom."(11 :2)

Solomon speaks there of wisdom, the thing Solomon knew most about. And this is what he says elsewhere in Proverbs about wisdom:

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight."(Proverbs 9:10)

My dear friends in Christ, you want honor? Be humble. You want humility? Be wise. You want wisdom? Fear the Lord. Honor *the* King. Or to put it another way: You want your "I" to be healthy? Remember that it's not about "I." It's about Jesus -

- in His ✠ Name,

Amen!