

January 16, 2022  
The Second Sunday after Epiphany  
Pastor Matt Duerr

**Be Like Mike August!**

Grace mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. Welcome to the second Sunday after Epiphany. The word Epiphany means to make manifest, to reveal, to make something obvious. But it carries with it also that idea of suddenness; that this is a sudden revelation as the star was a sudden revelation to the wise men. During the Epiphany Season we are going to make manifest. Make manifest the answer to the question, ‘who am I?’

When I was in high school as a freshman, this is what I was given an assignment in my English nine class: write an essay titled “Who am I?” And so I put down you know, I am the son of George and Joyce Duerr. My dad is a pastor, my mom is a housewife. I was born in Downey, CA on January 27th, 1960. I love pizza, I love tacos. I absolutely abhor, you know things like well at that time, cream of mushroom soup, and that still holds to today. But at that time, I did not care for asparagus because the only asparagus I ever had was really soggy, yucky stuff. But it was really everything that I've done. And when I was finished, I gave it to my dad to proofread it to see what he thought, and he said oh, you did a very good job. But, well let's fast forward to about four years later. I was in college, and I was in a psychology class being taught by Dr. Knauss. Dr. Knauss said on the very first day of class; I'd like to get to know who all of you are so I'd like you to take this class period to write a short essay ‘who are you?’ so that I get to know you. And I quickly took out some paper and I began writing and in less than one minute, I turned in my essay about who I am to Dr. Knauss. He looked at me and asked, are you already done? I said, ‘Oh yes I am.’ Why, why, I'd, I'd like to see that. So, I gave him my paper and he looked at it, and he read it, and it said, “I am a redeemed child of God.” And he looked at me and he said, ‘Mr. Duerr, this is not exactly what I was expecting. But this is Christ College Irvine and I guess I really have to accept this. But if you told me a little bit more about your family life, I'd appreciate that.’ So I did.

That's the question we're going to be looking at, 'who am I? or 'who are you?' Modern society, science tells us that you are nothing more than modified pond scum that evolved into apes. So, you are a modified pond scum, ape-kind of monster. I'm here to tell you, nope, that's not it! Really, what the Bible tells us is you are dirt, or dust, whichever you want to go with. Because Genesis 2:7 tells us, "Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." It kind of gives a whole new meaning to dirty old man.

But, after the fall into sin, what did God reiterate? For you are dust and to dust you shall return. And when you look there at the very beginning of the Bible, that's pretty humbling isn't it; to hear that we are dirt. And yet it's pretty awesome. We're dirt that God picked up, formed into His own image, breathed into us personally new life. And when we look at the rest of the Bible, He loves what He formed so much, that He saved us, and He's given us a purpose in life. To go and make disciples and to bring glory to Him in all we do. And so, when you look at that, you could say, 'who am I? "I'm special!" And it introduces us to that great dichotomy - your dirt, that's pretty humble. I'm special - that's pretty proud.

So, we're going to look at humility and pride. Because of sin we are humble and grateful, as we should be. Now let me explain what I'm saying there because there's a huge lesson here. Gratitude and humility cannot be separated. Gratitude is the child, or the offspring of humility. It starts with humility. Humility says, 'I'm dirt, I don't deserve anything.' I'm so grateful that God has forgiven me. On the flip side, entitlement is born out of pride. Consider going back to Genesis again; Adam and Eve they felt they were entitled to be like God. So proud, that they took it upon themselves to say we know better than you God. Yes, you said we would die if we ate from this tree, but we know that it is because it will make us like you. That's why you don't want us to eat it.

**Today that has really grown** to live however we want. You want to live with your partner, that's fine. You don't need to be married; you can do whatever you want. You want to be married to the same sex, oh that's fine no problem. You want to be divorced 24 times, no problem. You want

to change your gender, which is written into you by your DNA, gosh, by golly, that's OK! You're entitled to it. And that is extreme pride!

When you think about it, especially within the church, but oftentimes within society too, most people have the viewpoint that pride is bad; and that humility is good. And you know that has a good biblical basis to it. Proverbs 3:34 which is also quoted by James, in James 4:6 and Peter, in first Peter 5:5 says clearly, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." That sounds pretty cut and dried, right? Or is it? Pride certainly is bad or a vice. When we look at the word pride, or proud in the Bible, it is almost always used in a rebuke. And the number one form of pride is revealed in boasting. Remember our president a number of years ago? "I did that!" How many times have you heard somebody say, 'I did that' or 'I am' and they're referring to 'I made millions' or 'I'm a great scholar,' or 'I've accomplished this.'

Within the church it's kind of it it's worked its way in a prosperity gospel of: I do what God wants, therefore He blesses me, and therefore I'm wealthy and healthy and everything because 'I did this.' And we see it also within the church sometimes in the area of the evangelism, 'I did this, and I brought this many people to the church. And usually when that is said, it's in a reference to numbers and how well the person has done. But no matter what, it is when we start thinking in that way; 'I did' or 'I am,' it takes root. And we stop looking to God as the source of what is good in our life. It's our sinful, shall we say, default. We always go back to pride.

That's what Christ had to deal with, with the Pharisees in our gospel this morning. That's why He says about them, that they trusted in themselves, that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt. They looked at how religious they were and everybody else and scoffed, 'you people just don't understand.' But compare that to another Pharisee, his name was Saul. We know him as Saint Paul. Saint Paul certainly could boast if he wanted to. After all, he wrote more of the books of the New Testament than any other author. He probably led more people to Christ than anyone else in the world ever has. He probably planted more churches. And Saint Paul even raised a person from the dead. Boy, he could boast and yet when we look at our Epistle

lesson today, first Timothy 1:15, how did he describe himself? I love the King James version because there it is “chief of sinners.” That is why we just sang that song. It’s Paul’s hymn. It comes from what Paul said about himself.

Paul understood what Horatius Bonar once said: “I love, because He loveth me. I live because He lives.” Paul knew, we owe our very lives; both our physical, temporal, existence and our eternal existence to the power, the grace, and the mercy of Christ. Therefore, we must resist the temptation to be prideful *in ourselves*, even to the point of we shouldn’t even say I beat cancer. Because, in my particular case we prayed about it. Who beat cancer? God did, He heard our prayer, answered.

But be on guard, humility is oftentimes a vice too. How? Well, when our humility is based I. For instance, humility can take the form of self-loathing. How? “Oh, I’m not worthy to serve the church; I’m not worthy to be a Deacon; I’m not worthy to be an elder; in fact, I’m so bad I’m not worthy to be a member of the church; or even go to church.” You’ve heard that before? I know I sure have. That’s false humility. When humility takes the form of cowardice, ‘who am I to tell someone that they are doing something wrong. I’m a nobody.’ If you know God’s word, somebody is doing wrong, you have every right to tell them it’s wrong because it’s what’s going to lead them to sin, to hell.

Or true false humility. I’m going to share with you two quotes I have personally heard and no, not at a comedy club. The first quote I’ve heard in the last two months. I had a person say to me; I quote, “I’m the most humble person I’ve ever known.” Wow! That’s humility, isn’t it? Or the other, “I’m so proud of my humility.” When we focus on self, both pride and humility are vices. But when we focus on Christ as the One through whom all things were made, that were made and so He is the One who breathed life into us; and He is the one who died on the cross to give us eternal life, it creates a transformation in us where then pride and humility become good things.

For instance, Paul writes in Romans 15:17 “In Christ Jesus then I have reason to be proud of my work for God.” Paul was saying Christ is the foundation, it is through the power of the Holy Spirit that he sent

that I live and breathe and talk. To Him goes all the glory. But yet he was proud in the Lord, or of the Lord. As he writes in first Corinthians 13:1 Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord. He was quoting Jeremiah when he said that. So, what does it mean by boast in the Lord? We can boast! Our God loves us so much that He died for us! Are there any other gods out there that people can claim that for? Nope! We can boast that He has made us, who are sinners to be a royal priesthood, a holy nation, of people belonging to God. In other words, He's taken us sinners and he's given us an identity, a purpose in life. We can boast that we know our God will ever never leave us nor forsake us, our God is so good that He alone has humbled Himself, to become a man, to die to pay the price of our sin, to rise from the dead to take us into heaven, and to come back and to take us home. And when we boast of those things, notice what all of them also say about me; yes, I needed to be changed. I needed to be died for. I needed all of that because I'm a sinner and I fall short of the glory of God.

That boasting in the Lord elevates the greatness of God and emphasizes our falling short. And our falling short is what gives birth to humility. Moses knew he fell short. And so, we read that he was a humble servant. Peter denied his Lord three times, he knew he didn't deserve to be a disciple of Christ yet he was. Paul was out arresting Christians seeking to have them executed he knew he fell short. Christ, the very Son of God actually humbled Himself to take care of the falling short of the Moses, Peter, Paul, of me, of you. This is why Peter says, "clothe yourself with humility towards one another."

There's no one better than the other here in church. We're all the same. But how do we clothe ourselves with humility toward one another? I think again we looked to Peter who said, "be sober, be watchful, for your adversary the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. Resist him standing firm. And what does standing firm entail? What does resistance mean? Well when it comes to resisting the sin of pride or even sin of humility; step one is pray. And you might say, 'Pastor Matt, pray?' Yes because just think about what we're doing when we pray. We are humbling ourselves, or at least we sure should be, because we're coming to God and saying Lord, I pray for this because I can't do it. I fall short. Only you can do it. And so there we get that gratitude that

God can do it, and we praise Him and there goes our praising, our thanksgiving, and prayer. And at the same time, when we have our prayers, our petitions before the Lord, were saying: "Lord we can't deal with the cancer, we can't deal with the lack of unity in our country, we can't deal with those things. We need You!

Second, I know there's going to be some people, they won't like me saying this but it's a reality, Bible study. How does Bible study fight pride, humility, false humility? Because the Bible lays it out for us and reveals to us who we are and reveals to us who God is and what God has done for us!

Third, fellowship. Coming and actually worshiping together with each other. No one is greater, no one is lesser. All have heard His call and are here because they want to worship, to thank Him, to praise Him, to honor Him. And notice there's no I there. It's not that you come to church to get. You don't come to get a great message from the pastor or get brownie points for being in church. No, we come because well because we're His humble servants and we understand we don't deserve heaven but it's ours anyway. So, we come to thank Him to praise Him and honor Him. And how humbling for us right now, there's a small church here in Lodi, a small church up in Jackson, and a small church in Valley Springs. How humbling for us to be coming to church and realizing we don't have the financial wherewithal to afford a pastor. We don't have the financial wherewithal to sustain operations as a ministry if we rely on ourselves in our own little or very big buildings. How joyful and how proud we should be that our LORD has led us to an answer.

An answer that is so fitting for Epiphany. Remember the wise man who saw a star? People could say they were astrologers that they found it in a false god, the message of Christ. And what is God using with us right here, right now as you hear the sermon? A digital sermon which is going over the Internet. Home of Facebook, Tick Tok, YouTube and all of those absolutely ungodly things. We should be joyful, not critical. We should just be thanking God and proud of our God that we are worshipping Him now in three different places. All of us united by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He has called us to be here right now!

That reminds me of something that happened recently in the childcare center. I was walking down the hallway by our infant area and I was talking to one of the teachers. And one of the teachers in one of the infant classrooms said, "Oh my gosh, Pastor Matt, as you were walking down the hall little August heard your voice and the guy just lit up! He's got the biggest smile!" I had to walk go over and there was August and I picked him up and he just smiled like crazy. And I thought, you know isn't this a perfect example God our Father and us? Little August hears the voice of his pastor; you should see him when he hears the voice of his dad and his mom. Boom! A big old smile on his face. Why? For his parents especially, because they love him, they care for him, they provide for him. They do everything for him. He loves them as a result. This is exciting for him. And August is going to grow. He'll always be growing physically. We're going to see him grow and spiritually we're going to see him grow, where the good Lord willing; someday when he's older he's willing to sacrifice his time to take care of his mom and dad because they're old. They once took care of him, so he'll take care of them.

You know, isn't that a perfect example for us with God? He's the one who's given us life. He's the one who has saved us. He's the one who calls us. Coming to church, we should be smiling as big as could be, and as we get older, we won't have to care for Him. No now we know He'll take us home. Until then when we hear His call we will respond.

And so, I go back to, years ago there was an individual who many called the best basketball player ever, his name was Michael Jordan. There was a whole series of commercials: "Be like Mike." Nope, today it's "Be like little August!" We can learn them a lot from that little 6 month old baby.

In our Saviors' Name. Amen