

We have pride in our country. We have pride in our community. We have pride in our sports teams, in our schools, in our families, in our appearances. We are taught and encouraged that it is right to cultivate pride and all these things, and there is no fault in that.

But what about pride in religion? What role does pride play in religion? Or, even more uncomfortably, what role does pride play in faith?

The short answer is, none. Pride has absolutely no place in faith.

But all because that is the short answer does not mean this sermon is done. *Short answer* does not equal *short sermon*. Because this is worth some reflection, especially as we begin our journey through and beyond these days of Holy Week—tonight, Maundy Thursday...tomorrow, Good Friday....and finally into the light and joy of Easter Sunday.

In the book of Matthew, in his Sermon on the Mount, and in its counterpart in his Sermon on the Plain in the book of Luke, it is true that Jesus says, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you—this is essence of the law and the prophets.”

But tonight, as in so many other cases, Jesus changes this commandment, because he fulfills the law and the prophets...and at first, it seems like a small change, but it is, in fact, enormous. Gigantic. Monumental.

By changing his commandment from “do unto others as you would have them do unto you” to “do unto others as I have done to you,” Jesus completely takes human pride

out of the picture. Removes it entirely. It seems like a small grammatical change, but it completely shifts the focus of love, from *self-serving* to entirely *selfless*.

A few examples. According to the original commandment, I would lend you ten dollars, in the hopes that if I ever needed money you would return the favor. According to the original commandment, I would pick up your kids today, because tomorrow I might need you to pick up mine. I have your back, in the hopes that, when the tides turn, you will have mine. Pride plays a major role in this, because, yes, I am doing for you, but it is always with my own self in mind. And this is how the world turns. This is how the human race rolls. Human love is more an expression of sentimental tit-for-tat.

Human love hardly ever ends up kneeling in front of another person with the sole purpose of washing their dirty feet and refusing to have the gesture returned. Human love hardly ever is expressed by acts of healing and feeding and acts of compassion without expecting a crumb in return. And, even more rarely is human love shown by dying for another person, and not only for another person, but a planet-full of people, and not only a planet-full of people, but a planet-full of people who hate you.

There is no room for pride in this kind of love. And yet this is exactly what Jesus is calling for tonight...to go beyond loving one another as we want to be loved...and instead to love one another as he has loved us....to do as Jesus does, to love as Jesus loves. A love that exists completely for the other person. A love that is given to ones who not only do not understand it, but do not deserve it.

I had a rich friend in London who, when he died, left an original Picasso sketch to his only brother...one who couldn't care less about art. This tormented me, that my friend would leave this valued sketch to someone who didn't appreciate its value or care about its worth...instead of leaving it to a museum or, perhaps, even my fine self. In his will, he wrote, "I leave it to my brother in the hopes that this will teach him the value of such beauty, for the others already know."

To kneel in front of his confused and unappreciative disciples and wash their filthy feet...to feed multitudes of starving people with only a few fish and bits of bread...to touch and heal countless diseased and rotting bodies...*to die an excruciating death so that others might live*...is to teach us how to love...selflessly, purely, and without a single shred of pride...to love one another fully and completely, without condition or a single drop of conceit, which is how Jesus loves us, which is how he dies for us.

Expect nothing in return, Jesus says. Do as I do. Love as I love. Take the word "self" entirely out of the equation. It is a small tweak in grammar, but a tweak that, in fact, changes the entire world.