

**Josh 3:7-17; Ps 107:1-7; 1 Thess 2:9-13;
Mt 23:1-12 Service of Holy Communion
The Humbled and the Exalted – 11-05-17**

Today we are on the banks of the Jordan River. The Lord is speaking to His new leader, Joshua. Imagine trying to replace Moses – the Moses: Law-giver and Patriarch of the nation. Joshua has just been made commander of these two million plus people headed to the Promised Land. A daunting assignment! The people followed Moses for forty years. Perhaps, like Joshua, you have a task before you that seems huge to accomplish. It may be a leadership challenge – or a project calling for creativity and original thinking, or even a personal challenge of another kind. We know Joshua has been praying and calling out to God. Why? Because God is moving to do wonders among His people to lift Joshua up in their sight. Joshua has humbled himself before the Lord. And God speaks to him, saying He (God) will lift him up.

Joshua will command the priests to carry the ark of the covenant into the middle of the Jordan and then stand while the multitudes of God's people

cross over on dry ground. God is going to part the river. Our hero, Joshua, could have said, “That’s a crazy idea! I can come up with something better.” The new commander could have had his carpenters and artisans build a sturdy bridge over the river. He could have commissioned a fleet of boats to ferry the people across. He could have had any number of great and grand ideas for meeting the challenge. All in his own human power. In other words, he could have exalted himself above the Lord.

But, Joshua is God’s servant. He has learned in his years of seeking the Lord and being obedient. God will make a way where there is no way. So, put yourself in Joshua’s shoes (sandals) for a moment. Consider the humility required to order the priests out into the middle of the river. Does this seem like a crazy idea? Would you humbly follow God’s command to do such a thing? I mean, place yourself in the path of God’s Spirit and wait for Him to do a divine act in His own exalted power. As we are humbled, God is exalted.

This humble attitude is for anybody who is called to talk about Jesus. That's all of us. The Apostle Paul, though he says the church should support its ministers, had a day job as a tentmaker – in Corinth and in Thessalon'ica. He did not wish to burden the churches in those places. The main thing he brings to us in this passage from his first letter to the church is that when he and his ministry team bring the Word of God, the people are moved to receive that Word from God – not from humans. It is not Paul's word, or Silas' word. It is God's Word. When the preacher or the teacher and the people acknowledge the true Gospel message, God is free to be at work in the church and in the mission field where they are.

When we human beings humble ourselves in God's presence, He is exalted – and we inherit the high calling of the Lord Jesus. Our Savior is exalted above everyone and everything in the universe. His promise is that we will be with Him both now and when time ends.

In Cuba, when Fidel Castro was passing away, there was an erosion in the strict communistic and atheistic ideals of the national government.

Then, in 2014, when his brother Raul took over leadership, there was a surge in in communist revolutionary fervor, and pressure on Christians increased. Christians began to experience a renewed passion to evangelize – to share the Good News of Jesus. That is the effect of persecution upon the body of Christ. The campaign launched by congregations in Cuba was called “power to transform.”

The plan was simple: *“Church members began to go to bars, cafes and parks to share Jesus. Communist officials gathered church leaders for questioning, when they found this happening. But, the campaign has no central leader and receives no foreign support. So, there was no one to arrest. Jesus-followers continue to share their faith with confidence.”*

Because of wise planning and humble leadership, this campaign has spread beyond Havana to other cities on the island. The spirit of God’s love is overcoming the spirit of the communist revolution.

Jesus gives us a God's eye view of the opposite of spiritual humility. He lays it at the door of the church leaders of His day – the scribes and the Pharisees. “They do not practice what they teach.” (v 2) We have heard the description of their ways. They always publicize their good deeds. They love to get credit for what they are doing. They take the place of honor. So, Jesus teaches his disciples. His advice is perfect.

Don't take a position above anybody else. No fancy titles or degrees. Jesus is our leader and Jesus is our instructor. The greatest among you must be your servant.

All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted. Exalted not by others, but by the Lord.

John Baptist said it at the end of his ministry, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” (Jn 3:30)

Amen.

