

Numbers 12:1-15
Called to Godly Humility

In Ancient Greek Mythology, there is a legend of a young man named Narcissus. Narcissus was an extremely handsome young man. One day Narcissus was out hunting when he stopped by a stream to get a drink of water. As he knelt down at the stream bank, he caught a glimpse of his own reflection staring back at him. He was immediately mesmerized by his own beauty. Reaching out he saw he couldn't touch the reflection without distorting it. Starting to lean back he realized he couldn't move without losing sight of himself. And so Narcissus sat there at that river bank, staring at himself, until he wasted away.

Well they weren't going for subtlety on that one, were they? The moral of the story is crystal clear: vanity and self-absorption will lead to your downfall. It's a moral that rings true in relationships and business and well, you name it. Eventually that kind of selfish thinking will lead to one's downfall. But this morning we're also reminded that such a warning goes beyond the Greek wisdom. It goes beyond a ruined life. This morning our God warns us that it's also a danger to our very souls threatening an eternal downfall.

Now, a few weeks ago at the installation of our new teachers, we heard Jesus remind us that whoever wants to be his disciple, must deny himself and follow him. The call to discipleship closeness of our imitation of Christ is found in self living. Not chiefly concerned for me and my desires, but concerned about Christ and his desires for my life. It is a gift of the Spirit planted in us by faith.

But that calling is confronted each and everyday by a selfish, vane, and proud nature living within each of us.

This morning we see that struggle on full display in the story of Moses and his two older siblings (Aaron and Miriam). And as we consider what we can learn from it, we'll see how Christ has impacted our egos and how he's enabled us to live in the godly humility he has called us to.

In Aaron and Miriam we have a pretty clear picture of what it can look like when our sinful nature gets the better of us. It would appear that Aaron and Miriam had grown discontent with their status in comparison with their younger brother Moses. They too had been the mouthpiece of God, why did Moses always get all the credit? Selfish pride had led to jealousy...jealousy led to slander. And what better way to discredit Moses in

the eyes of the prideful Israelites than to point out that Moses had married a non-Israelite woman.

The LORD's response was swift. **Right then the LORD spoke suddenly to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, "You three come out to the Tent of Meeting!" The three of them came out. The LORD came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the entrance to the tent.**

Sends a chill down the spine, doesn't it? I can remember those days when my sisters and I would be at each other and despite the repeated warnings from the other room we'd keep pushing the limits until (pound, pound, pound), down the hall came the exaggerated footsteps of my dad. Some of you have met my dad. He's usually so calm. And those are the ones you have to be afraid of! If dad was storming in, it was going to be trouble. **The LORD came down...**

Now lest we think the LORD's response was an overreaction, remember a few details. This wasn't just a sibling rivalry. Aaron was the High Priest. Miriam was a prophetess. And Numbers 12 puts us squarely on the heels of two widespread rebellions among the people. This was a serious challenge to Moses. And therefore it was a serious challenge to God himself.

And therein lies the danger. Every time selfish pride rears its ugly head, ultimately its end result is a challenge to God himself. Lord, what you've given me is not good enough. Lord, what you're asking me to deal with is unfair. Lord, I deserve better than this!

In challenging Moses and seeking to discredit him for their own gain, they were really challenging the LORD. Because as he explained, the LORD hadn't just spoken THROUGH Moses (as he did with Aaron and Miriam as well), he had spoken WITH him, face to face. And what were they saying about the LORD by speaking against the one he had chosen for such a relationship?

As the pillar of cloud withdrew from the Tent of Meeting, there was Miriam, covered in leprosy from head to toe. Why Miriam and not Aaron? Simply, she was the instigator. Unlike other places, her name is conspicuously listed before Aaron's in this section. Like he had been at Mt Sinai with the golden calf, Aaron had been swept up the sinful plot, but it was big sister, Miriam, who had led the charge.

Every single one of you here this morning has various callings from God. We each have unique callings in life: husband, wife, parent, child, student, employee, or employer. And we each have our shared calling as disciples of

Christ. In all of them God's will is clear: live to glorify him. Deny self. Live in service to him and your neighbor.

But what happens when we find that God has blessed someone else more than us or in a way we covet (like Aaron and Miriam)? What happens when we feel we've been wronged (as Moses actually was)? What happens when we have a desire we know is out of line with God's desires? More often than we'd care to admit, we live our lives to glorify ourselves...we scheme to get what isn't ours...we take justice into our own hands. More often than we'd care to admit, we get caught staring in the mirror and putting all our time and energy into looking after the reflection we can't help but be infatuated with. And that puts us in real danger. That puts us squarely against the LORD himself as our selfish pride questions his judgments and his care.

God signified the extent of that danger by inflicted Miriam with leprosy. Leprosy as a skin disease was bad enough, but what made it even worse were the conditions God had attached to it. Lepers weren't allowed to live in the Israelite camp. They were outcasts, cut off from the rest of society...cut off from the tabernacle. Just as sin endangers us...threatens to cut us off from God himself...if left to run rampant through our soul.

Standing on the other side of this story was Moses. He had a real grievance didn't he? It was one thing to be opposed by Pharaoh and the Egyptians...one thing to have the people grow discontent...but his own brother and sister? Cast them down, LORD? Wipe them away, LORD? Maybe if Moses was following suit in listening to his sinful pride. But we're told that **the man Moses was very humble, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth**. Aside from the questioning the sincerity of that verse since Moses himself wrote it (to which I would remind you that the Spirit inspired those words), what it means is important. Humble here isn't just talking about a lack of boasting. The word specifically means humble in the face of opposition. It wasn't that Moses didn't struggle with pride, but what it does mean is that a man who experienced plenty of opposition in his life had learned to not fight back with his own strength but instead humbly wait for God to take action and trust that God would do what was best.

Having lived that humility in the face of opposition, Moses went a step further. When God struck his sister with leprosy there was no "fair is fair, you got what you deserved!" He had compassion on her...the one who had ridiculed his wife...questioned his leadership...sought to shame him. He faced his opposition with love and prayed for the deliverance of his enemies. God heard Moses' prayer and He healed Miriam.

And thank the LORD for a man like Moses this morning. But not because you can just muster up the strength and humility to emulate him just by seeing these two contrasting examples side by side. Thank the LORD for the man LIKE Moses. Jesus, our Lord.

Christ like humility starts with the work of our selfless Savior on our behalf. **Our Savior was led like a lamb to the slaughter...yet as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so He did not open His mouth.** As He looked out at the faces of those proud, arrogant, sinners who had nailed His hands and feet to the cross the only words He had to say were, Father, forgive them (Lk 23:34).

Because God sent us a Savior who was perfect in his selfless humility, we have been made into something new. Because of the sacrifice Christ made for us, God has removed our sin from us just as He removed the leprosy from Miriam. And that punishment of death and separation from God has been paid. Through the washing of Christ's blood, we have been made children of God and heirs of eternal life. Through his intercession we stand forgiven and redeemed.

Christ-like humility is impossible for us by nature. By nature, we're trapped in selfish pride and arrogance. Yet the Lord has made it possible as His Spirit works within us. Through His Word and the power of your baptism, He has given us a renewed nature, one that imitates Him.

And now as Paul says: **Let this attitude be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus...he emptied himself by taking the nature of a servant. ...He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross.**

As a Christian, impacted by the crucifixion and resurrection of your Savior, when you look at your reflection you see more than just yourself. Because there, in that mirror, staring back at you is a child of God, forgiven in Christ, called to follow him, with a renewed will to deny self and live to the glory of God.

So let us always strive to serve Christ. Let us live our lives to bring glory to God, imitating Moses and Christ, humbly fulfilling the responsibilities of the callings He has placed us in and submitting to Him and to His will no matter the oppositions we face. May God grant it for each of us. Amen.