

**“Right Proud”**  
**Sermon by Rev. John Dieterly, Retired Peace UCC Pastor**  
**Peace United Church of Christ**  
**May 3, 2015**

I would like to thank Pastor Tom for inviting me to participate in this sermon series. I don't remember the exact words I said to him, but when he invited me, I think I said "I would be right proud to be back here" and then I found out my topic is "Pride", one of the seven deadly sins. Oh, my! I hope I didn't say "I'd be right proud".

I know that sometimes words change their meanings over the years, so I began wondering if the definition of pride has changed or evolved over the years so that it doesn't even belong in that list of seven deadly sins. After all, think about it. All those other sins, right there on the front of your bulletins, are just that. They are sins, right? You know...wrath, greed, sloth, lust, envy. Gluttony? Well, you know, if you go to a buffet, you pay good money for that. You need to get your money's worth...right? But pride? Really? A deadly sin? Don't we often think of pride as not just a good thing but a necessary thing?

Educators often talk about the importance of students having a sense of pride. We might even call it a good sense of self-esteem. Self-esteem, I guess, is just a milder way of talking about pride, isn't it? Besides, every school I know of talks about good school spirit and having some pride in your school. I don't think a week goes by when I am at the downtown YMCA in the locker room listening to someone talk about Aggie pride. We hear it a lot, don't we? That is not the only school that talks about school pride. There are some people here this morning who take a great deal of pride in their favorite school or their favorite basketball team. They are very proud to say they have won five championships...right? This is a good thing, isn't it?

Then, I noticed even on the front page of the Peace Press, there it is, folks, in black and white it says "With love and great pride this month, we honor our mothers and our veterans. So...did we make a mistake? Maybe pride doesn't even belong on that list. Can we really call pride a deadly sin, or do we have a mistake in definition here? I think we have to be careful how we define and how we understand to word "pride".

In order to clarify things, I went to that ultimate source of wisdom...the Internet! I found three definitions for the word "pride". This is the first definition. It is the longest one: "A feeling of deep pleasure or satisfaction derived from one's own achievements, the achievements of those whom one is closely associated over qualities or possessions that are widely admired, for example, to take pride in a good job well done". It feels good...right? It sounds good to me.

The second definition I found was: "A group of lions forming a social unit". Wouldn't you know it? I guy who used to work for Heifer Project found something to do with animals somewhere.

The third definition...ummm! It starts to have a bit of an edge to it. Listen to this: "A high, or inordinate opinion of one's own dignity, importance, merit or superiority; an inordinate opinion of one's self". Okay? So, maybe there is a positive and a negative side to pride.

In order to pick up on that third definition a little bit more, and for a clearer understanding of why pride is included in that seven deadly sins, I thought it would be good to turn to scripture and learn the use of that word "pride" in the context it is used by the biblical writers. It is very interesting. One of my big, old books from seminary has a list of all the Hebrew and Greek words for "pride" that are used in the scripture. There are ten Hebrew words and two Greek words that have been translated into English word "pride". These words have been used a total of 46 times in the Old and New Testaments, starting way back in Leviticus, going through the Psalms and Proverbs.

There are eight uses of the word in the prophets and twice in the New Testament. Just pulling a few of those out, in Psalm 59 we read that pride is connected to words, indicating that our words can lead us into a sinful pride. In Psalm 36 and Proverbs 8, the same word translated as pride earlier is now translated as arrogance, so we are seeing a real negative side coming out here. Proverbs 14 and Isaiah 16 translate that same word as insolence. Jeremiah equates pride among the people of Israel as not listening to God but following their own will.

In Chapter 8, Jeremiah is against the Moabites and it says that the sins of Moab are loftiness, pride, arrogance, haughtiness of his heart. You see, each of those words is used in parallel to the word “pride” and expands our understanding of the intent of the author, our understanding of the point that Jeremiah tried to make.

Ezekiel describes the sins of Sodom as he is prophesying about Sodom and Gomorrah. The sin of Sodom is pride, excess of food and prosperous ease but they did not aid the poor and the needy, so we’re seeing another element coming out here. Oh, and this one is even connected to food. The Gospel of Mark records a time when Jesus had an encounter with some Pharisees. The Pharisees were criticizing him because the disciples did not practice that ritual cleansing before they would eat their food. Jesus taught that that ritual really wasn’t necessary because whatever goes into the person from the outside does not defile the person, but it is rather what comes out of a person, out of a person’s mouth, that defiles them. Then He went on to say that it is from within that evil intentions come, then He lists all these evil intentions.

Listen what Mark wrote, remembering the words of Jesus and this list of evil intentions includes fornication, theft, murder, adultery, amorousness, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, empathy, slander, pride, folly. It seems like the word “pride” doesn’t keep very good company in scripture. Again, all those words used in parallel broaden our understanding of what the biblical writers mean when they use those words that are translated as pride and really lift up that negative side of it.

Perhaps one of the stories in the Gospel that illustrates the negative aspects of pride was that lesson read in our Gospel lesson this morning. On the surface, we think about that story of the rich man and tearing down barns and building new barns as sort of a story about selfishness and greed, but the rich land owner wanted to keep all that harvest for himself and not share it with the poor, but if you look at the story, I think there is something else going on there. There is some arrogance there. The man said, as was read in the scripture by Ted: What should I do. I have no place to store **my** crops. I will do this. I will tear down **my** barn. I will build bigger barns, and I will store all **my** grain and all **my** goods, and I will say to **myself** “sit back, enjoy, eat, drink and be merry”. Do you see the insolence there...the arrogance? The man is thinking only what “I” have and what “I” have accomplished.

In contrast, Jesus taught us to store up treasures in heaven, not earthly things, to be rich towards God, and Jesus lead us to take on a whole new dimension in our thinking about life. Jesus taught us that all the things of this world pale in comparison to the richness of God. Maybe another way to put it is to say that this life on this earth is not all that there is. There is another life beyond death and that is where the real enduring treasures lie. All the treasures of this world--whether they be a richer harvest or bigger barns, greater wealth, winning teams or a job well done—pale in comparison to the treasures of heaven. Isaac Watts picked really picked that up in the old hymn that we all like “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”. We all know that hymn. We like it included during the Easter season, but have you ever stopped to really ponder those words in the very first verse: “When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of glory died, my richest gain I count but loss and pour contempt on all my pride”?

For Isaac Watts, and I would think for all of us, our greatest possession is God’s love, demonstrated so clearly to us on the cross and transformed for us into a wonderful hope through the resurrection. I hope you can see the pride can be, shall we say, a slippery slope. A little pride, which we might call self-esteem, might indeed be a good thing, a necessary thing, but a little more pride, and a little more, and a little more, very quickly becomes arrogance, insolence. I believe if we look at life through the

resurrection, everything in the world through a new light, the greatest treasures we find in this life are nothing or, as Isaac Watts wrote “even the best things in life are a loss compared to what will be revealed to us in the life to come”.

Another way to look at it is, it is not just right to be proud of the things we accumulate in this life or even our accomplishments in this life. What we can be proud of is the promise that Jesus made to the one next to him on the next cross, a promise that comes to us, too, when he said “You will be with Me in paradise.” Now, there is something we can be right proud of! Amen.