

“Becoming With God”

1 Samuel 1:4-20

1 Samuel 2:1-10

Hebrews 10:11-14

Mark 13:1-8

Jesus says, “Beware that no one leads you astray.” The Chinese American leader Russell Jeung comments on an important lesson his father taught him about humility. Russell Jeung writes, “As the youngest child in my family, my job at Chinese banquets was to make sure everyone’s teacup was kept full. My dad, without fail, reminded me at these meals to be alert to the needs of others. I think he took as much pride in seeing me serve food to dinner guests as he did in seeing me get good grades.”<sup>1</sup> Russell Jeung highlights the virtue of humility by pointing to the Chinese characters making up the words for humility.... *Qiang xun*. In this regard, Jeung writes, “*Qiang* means to have a yielding spirit, not seeking one’s own pride or recognition. It pictures someone speaking while holding shafts of grain together, suggesting that words of humility prioritize the unity and harmony of the group first. *Xun* is the pictograph of the way a grandchild walks. We are to see ourselves like children, moving and acting in deference to our wiser elders.”<sup>2</sup>

Why might humility be important as we are in the process of becoming with God. Conversion is the life-long journey of becoming more like Jesus. Humility is the key to learn from Jesus, our elder brother. Humility keeps us away from pride. Pride directs us to self and that is problematic for becoming with God.

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<sup>1</sup>Russell Jeung, *At Home in Exile* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2016), 114-115.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

Jesus says, “Beware that no one leads you astray.” Oh, there are people who attempt to lead us astray. We know that. But could pride lead us astray as well? T. D.

Jakes in *Planted with a Purpose* writes,

Quite simply, we do not serve a stagnant, motionless, dormant, inactive or idle God.... We see that God is always on the move. God’s movement suggests progress and purpose. And though He may be silent during certain seasons, we must accept the fact that our God is a perpetually moving God. Now, if we see that God is always moving with purpose, who are we to think that we would be different from the Master who created us? God will move us to accomplish His ultimate goal and purpose in and for our lives.<sup>3</sup>

My hypothesis is that when we think God is silent or absent from our lives, pride kicks in and leads us astray. We begin to think we can accomplish what needs to be done.... without God. And the rest, well, becomes a forgone conclusion.

The Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel Readings remind us that individuals and pride can easily lead us astray, if we take matters into our hands. 1 Samuel 1:10-11 reads, “She [Hannah] was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD, and wept bitterly. She made this vow: ‘O LORD of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine or intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head.’” 1 Samuel 2:1-2 reads, “My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exalted in my God. There is no Holy One like the LORD, no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God.” Hebrews 10:23 reads, “Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful.” Mark 13:5-6 reads, “Then Jesus began to say to them, ‘Beware that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name and say, “I am he!” and they will lead many

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<sup>3</sup>T. D. Jakes, *Planted with a Purpose* (New York City, New York: Faith Words, 2020), 84.

astray.” Humility will keep us focused on becoming with God as opposed to taking things under our own control due to a person’s influence or pride.

Jesus’ teaching about being aware of individuals and pride leading us astray in Mark 13:1-8 focuses on a prediction that the Temple will be destroyed and the signs of the end of the age. Jesus predicts that many false messiahs will come and lead many of the faithful away. These false messiahs are pretenders or imposters. This text can easily produce fears and that is normal. But the gospel gives us hope and promises new life amid those fears. We cannot pride ourselves on our careers, abilities, or status in society to save us. The fear producing language of the apocalypse, the end times, is a great opportunity to acknowledge people’s real pain and our own as well. We can point others and ourselves to the cross, to Jesus. It is true that the end will come. But attempting to figure out the predictions is fleeting, deceptive, and the wrong focus. In fact, it is a waste of time and an unbiblical exercise.<sup>4</sup>

Where is Geneva Presbyterian Church going as approved by the Session, the board who governs our church? **Our Logo Tagline** is Loving God. Loving Others. Making Disciples. **Our Vision** is “All are welcome here. Really, we mean that! All are welcome! Just as God receives all who believe in Jesus Christ, Geneva aspires to be an inclusive congregation worshipping, learning, connecting, giving, and serving together.” **Our Mission** is “to remember, tell, and live the way of Jesus by being just, kind, and humble.”

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<sup>4</sup>In the two paragraphs of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of Paul K.-K. Cho, Stephen P. Riley, Leigh Campbell Taylor, Elizabeth Felicetti, C. Melissa Snarr, Thomas B. Slater, and Carolyn Browning Helsel in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year B, Volume 3* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021), 472-474, 475-477, 478-481, 482-484, 484-486, 487-489, and 489-490.

What does it mean for you to open your “Life Wallet” in humility? Tithe your time to worship, learn, and connect. Tithe your money and time to give and serve. Tithing from your “life Wallet” is the biblical focus for inoculating pride with humility, thus being less susceptible of being led astray. When you’re participating in God’s mission, you are becoming with God. God is always with you. God is on the move to fulfill God’s purpose and priorities in your life. Again, T. D. Jakes in *Planted with a Purpose* writes, “... could it be that our real problems of unbelief stems from the reality that we have put more of our faith in what or who has traumatized us then we have in the God who loves us?”<sup>5</sup> The process of becoming with God is a life-long journey of moving in and out of faith and doubt, yet experiencing God at work in it all.

Do not be led astray by others or pride. Do not be led astray to remember and do the former things Geneva Presbyterian Church succeeded at in the past. God is doing a new thing. Embrace the future for Geneva Presbyterian Church with faith. Amen.

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<sup>5</sup>T. D. Jakes, *Planted with a Purpose*, 90-91.