



One Page Sermon

By Rev. Robb McCoy

September 22, 2024

Humility: Listen more, speak less

Recap of sermon from September 22, 2024

Scripture: Ephesians 4:1-6

Hamilton is one of my favorite musicals, and as soon as I read the subtitle for this week, “Listen more, speak less,” I thought of the a from the song “Aaron Burr, sir.” It is the moment Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr meet. The tension in their relationship is the driving force behind most of the musical. Hamilton is the brash, intelligent, arrogant writer who became the intellectual force behind the Revolution and birth of the United States. Burr was a calculating, ambitious strategist. The two were friends and rivals, and their differences were summed up in this song—and perhaps this line:

“Talk less. Smile more,” is Burr’s advice to Hamilton, who is befuddled. “Don’t let them know what you’re against or what you’re for. You want to get ahead? Fools that run their mouths oft wind up dead.”

Of course, Burr’s prophetic words came true. Their rivalry, the exchange of words, letters, insults, and shifting allegiances led to the infamous duel between Burr and Hamilton, and Hamilton indeed wound up dead.

Many historians speculate what may have happened if Burr had missed—or if Hamilton had simply backed down from his rhetoric that led to the duel. Clearly it is speculation, but there are many who believe an elder Hamilton would have had the ambition, intellect, and drive to help take down slavery—which many of the founders thought was a necessary, but temporary, evil when the nation started.

Some believe Hamilton would have granted emancipation and allowed freemen to migrate west into the frontier. It is difficult to imagine how much our nation’s path might have been altered with a more abrupt end to slavery, and without it’s horrible ancestors, Jim Crow, redlining, and mass incarceration.

This brings us back to the theme for this week: Humility. One could argue Burr wasn’t arguing for humility, but for discretion. Yet it is hard to believe that Hamilton might have survived if he had eaten a little more humble pie.

Yet Hamilton’s lack of humility is a part of what drove him to greatness. His confidence was why he was able to achieve so much. Would more humility have lessened his power?



Would a more humble Hamilton been the driving force behind the shaping of the Constitution?

Humility—at its heart—is not about self-deprecation. It is not about being humiliated, shamed, or brought down. The root of the word is ground. It is being *grounded*. Much like the root of the Hebrew word we treat as a proper name *Adam*, which means dirt or ground. Being humble is to be grounded. For some, humility is a lowering. For those who believe they have all the answers, humility is about opening one’s mind to new possibilities. The humble are not to be walked over. They are grounded in their place in God and that allows them incredible strength—without belittling or demeaning others.

Parker Palmer, in his book *Healing the Heart of Democracy*, describes this tension as the balancing humility and *chutzpah*. For a strong society, we need the *chutzpah* to state our convictions, describe our lived experience, and articulate what matters. But we also need the humility to know that our lived experience is not the *only* experience, and accept the possibility that our convictions are misplaced.

Godly humility is rooted in Micah 6:8. where we are told to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. We need the *chutzpah* to do justice—to not give up our shot at making the world better. We need the humility to be kind to others, even in our pursuit of justice. And we need to acknowledge that our walk with God is just that—a journey of growth, curiosity, and learning. We are not called to stand next to God and defend all that we deem is right. We are called to walk humbly and accept that sometimes along the way, we may have something to learn.

Next Week: Love
Matthew 22:34-40