

## Don't Be Haughty

Romans 12:16b

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Do you ever find yourself preoccupied with being in the in-crowd? Do you ever find yourself all the time wanting to be with the in-crowd, whatever that in-crowd is; you kind of want to be with the swinging group or the people who are thought to be kind of smooth or sharp? That group varies, as our life progresses you know that.

At high school it's the jocks or the football heroes or it's the baseball stars and then at college, it's often the sports heroes or sometimes in certain colleges, it's the bohemians or the kind of easy-going, carefree, careless types who don't seem to worry about exams or anything or it's the group in some colleges that are academic and very successful.

Then of course, as you get into the 20s and the 30s, it's the kind of young executive group, with the Porsche and the skiing in Europe and the smooth, sharp operators in the latest restaurants that opens in the Twin Cities; it's that whole crowd. Do you ever find yourself wanting to be part of that?

Then of course as you get into middle age, it's the children at the private school and the two homes and the upward mobility in the company and in your financial life and then as you get into real middle age, then it's the kind of, we call it maturity at times but none of us are in maturity fortunately, but it's the two homes and the retirement home and the trips to Europe.

Do you ever find yourself wanting to be in that in group, wanting to be with the in-crowd? Now God has something to say to you that can bring real peace to your hearts if you're caught in that -- and many of us are in these days. God has something to say to you. So, would you look at it with me loved ones, it is Romans 12:16. See, we talked a couple of weeks ago about life in harmony with one another but here it is, the middle of verse 16.

Romans 12:16, "Do not be haughty but associate with the lowly, never be conceited." The Greek for that first phrase is, "Me ta hupselos phroneotes", not minding or not paying attention to high things. Not giving a lot of your thinking to high things and big things and swinging things and smoothie things and sharp things and the things that everybody else praises. Not paying attention to those, not minding those.

Let them elevate their gods in the media. Let them talk up the people that they think are important in their magazines, but don't you pay attention to those things, don't. Not paying attention to high things, that's what is translated, "Do not be haughty", and then you see the phrase, "But associate with the lowly", that's "Alla tais tapeinos sunapago me no". And it means "tapeinos" can be the neuter or the masculine.

"Tapeinos" is the word for "lowly" so it can mean giving yourself to the lowly or you can see in the footnote there in the RSV, you see the footnote "s" there, if you look at "But associate with the lowly" and then you see the little "s" after "lowly", if you go down to the note at the bottom of the page, you see if you translated it as a neuter "Tapeinos", it would be "give yourselves to humble tasks."

So it means don't be giving your attention to the high things, the things that everybody else thinks are wonderful and great and high and worthy to be praised. Stop fixing your mind on those things and give yourselves to lowly people or give yourselves to lowly tasks or humble tasks.

Give yourselves to little things, don't always be kind of wanting to be in the middle of everything and be thought of as having to do with all the important things. Give yourself to little people and to little things and then the last phrase there, the last clause, "Never be conceited".

"Maganasta phroneimo parkotois". It means don't be preoccupied with yourself. Don't be smart or conceited about yourself. Don't be all caught up with you, yourself. Don't be wise in your own conceits. That's it. That'll bring you great peace.

You know, you may say, "Well, I know that. I know that's right. I know that's the way I should be. I know that is virtuous and I know that is the humble thing to do. I know it's humble not to be haughty. I know it's humble to give myself to unimportant things and unimportant people. I know it's humble not to be conceited about myself. I know that's what I should be and I do try to be, again and again through my life I've tried to be but, when I look back upon my life up to this present moment, I must admit, I find that a lot of it has been spent trying to be in the in-crowd. I find there is something inside me that makes me want to be with the in-crowd." And yet loved ones, it's not only wrong to be like that -- it's not only immoral -- it's not only unrealistic -- but it's insane and unhealthy, it is, and you know it.

It takes tremendous strain to keep in with the in-crowd. If you're involved in trying to climb up those slippery executive slopes to success, trying to nod to the right person, say the right thing to the other person, not say the wrong thing to the wrong person, do exactly the right thing to keep yourself moving up those slopes, or you're trying to climb up that little social ladder that you have set your mind on, you know what a strain it is. You have to be always thinking, "Now what effect will this, that I am going to say, have on my future? What effect will this, that I am not going to say, have on the way these people view me?"

You have to watch every word you say. Your conversation, of course, becomes more like a recording than it is any expression of what you are yourself, you know that. You just have to give up saying what you really think and being what you really are. You have to engage in those one-liners that succeed in keeping everybody thinking you're quite a good guy or quite a good girl and you're moving along with them -- and yet not say too much that will somehow build a wall between you and them or spoil your progress.

So you end up with those clichés that you use to give the right impression to people. Of course, you know yourself that you become such a chameleon. A chameleon is one of those little animals that changes color according to its environment. You become such a chameleon that you almost forget who you are yourself.

It's hard to remember, "Now, what would I really have done in this situation when I was a little guy or a little girl and I was fresh and I was clean and I had my own thoughts. I knew what they were." You can get to the point in this business of always trying to be with the in-crowd, that you almost forget what you are like yourself.

In fact, I think many husbands and wives and many brothers and sisters, many relatives, many friends

here know how many of us have changed and we'll say that, somebody will say that to you, "Oh you've changed. You're not like you used to be" and you won't be able to tell how you've changed because it's come about so unconsciously.

Here is the way somebody put it, who was responding to this verse. "I find I am not only giving attention to high things but that much of my life, my time and my actions, are motivated by my desire to be popular or successful. Indeed I find I never seem to be contented. I am always grasping for something I haven't got -- a higher position, a better job, more recognition, a place of greater influence, a position of spiritual authority or social respect -- and I find I've little interest in people who are not leaders or popular or thought to be important. I spend no time and see no point in spending time with the nobodies, little ones who aren't known by anyone. I do very few things that aren't seen by men. I clean no restrooms. I dust no corners. I keep away from lowly tasks and unnoticed, unimportant acts of service." I wonder how many of us are like that.

We're so preoccupied with being in the in-crowd that we get caught up with what People magazine is praising or what Money magazine is praising or what seems to be the "in" way to be according to the TV personalities, and we lose all sense of being a real person at all and we find that it's the leaders we're interested in.

It's the "Top of the Pops" that we're interested in. It's the people that are popular and everybody wants to be with, those are the people we want to be with. We have no time for the nobodies. We have no time for the little tasks. We despise cleaning restrooms and vacuuming floors. We want to be doing things that everybody can see so that they can appreciate us, and loved ones it's an insane way to live. You know it and I know it.

It is so strained. It is such a discontented way and you can never win with it. You can never win because the in-crowd changes. The in-crowd today is the out crowd tomorrow and you have to switch your whole system to be with the new in-crowd. The people that praise you today condemn you tomorrow.

So you can't somehow win in this business of trying to get people to think you're a swinger or you're a part of the in-crowd and of course the worst of it is it absolutely perverts you as you are. It just makes mincemeat out of you. It takes a fresh, individual personality and it makes them one of the crowd. It takes away all your individuality and it leaves you a kind of little robot that'll do anything to be thought of as being with the important people.

Of course the other tragedy is, it doesn't matter how important the professor is that praises you, doesn't matter how important the boss is that thinks you're a real swinger or you're a real mover. It doesn't matter how important the group is that think you're really with it. Somehow they never seem to be able to give you the sense of importance that you really are yearning for, and so you keep on trying to get more importance and more importance.

The truth is loved ones, they can't give you a sense of importance and actually you know in your heart that the sense of importance never does satisfy because suddenly you find some very successful doctor throws himself off the bridge into the Mississippi and you begin to wonder, "Wait a minute, even if I become as successful as him, it's not really what is needed", or you find a Marilyn Monroe kills herself and you think, "Boy, I am no longer, I am nowhere near as well known as she is and boy, if she kills herself", or if Elvis Presley does an overdose and it doesn't seem to matter how important you become, it never seems to be totally satisfying.

Actually, we know that in our hearts, don't we? I mean Einstein has died and the world hardly paused and you know there would be a long time before we see a man as sharp as Einstein. John Wayne died, Kennedy died, Roosevelt died and the world hardly hesitates and you know actually it will probably be the same with us. It doesn't matter how popular we become, it doesn't matter how well known we've become, it doesn't matter how much we've been with the in-crowd, probably the moment you die, that moment, very few people will notice, in fact don't we often feel this?

We often feel, "Boy, if everybody thinks of themselves as much as I do and thinks as little of the rest of us as I do, then nobody will care two hoots when I go", and it dawns on us, "Yeah, we aren't too important", and the truth is loved ones, nobody can make you as important as you feel you should be. No in-crowd can.

You're either important in this world or you're not important, that's it. It's bluff -- all the sensitivity groups and the kind of build-yourself-up groups. You're either important or you're not important. If you're not important it's all a game anyway and you know it's a game and that's what comes home to you deep down. They're all being nicey-nicey to you because it's supposed to be psychologically healthy, spiritually uplifting but you really know, "Yeah, but I am not important. Let's face that I am not important", and the fact is you're not important. You're not.

You're not important to this world. You're really not, really. You're not vital to this world nor am I, we're not. That's why it can go on so successfully after we leave it. You're actually not important to the world nor am I important to the world, you're not, but the Creator who made you has pleasure to get from you doing and being what you are that he can get from none of the rest of us, that's it. That's how important you are.

The Creator of the world can get pleasure from you doing and being what He made you to do and be, pleasure that He can get from none of the rest of us, that's it. And if you aren't that and if you don't do what He sent you here to do, the Maker of the universe, the Significant Other above all significant others, will be pained and hurt in His heart and will feel like a man who has lost His only Son, if you don't be in this life and do in this life what He has sent you here to do and be, that's it.

The rest of us, we're as unstable and unreliable as you are yourself probably, and the praises of the crowd and the fame of the in-crowd, they come and go. And we're all really in the position of the Roman emperors you remember, who would come back from their military triumphs and would take that great triumphal procession through the triumphal arches in Rome and the chariot and their special horse that pulled the chariot and their prisoners on before them and all the spoil and the booty and the jewels that they took from the pagans and the heathen and the crowds would be cheering and calling out their name and bowing down before them and there was one slave whose job was to hold that crown, you remember, that wreath above their heads and whisper in their ear, "All fame is fleeting, all fame is fleeting." We're in the same situation.

The in-crowd come and go. You may be known, you may be popular, you may be thought well of or you may not be thought well of. They may think you're a swinger, they may not think you're a swinger, but really it's all by-the-by. The only one that really matters is the Creator who put you here and to whom we will all return at the end of this life. And He can get pleasure from you doing and being what He put you here to do and be, pleasure that He can get from none of the rest of us who live, have lived or will live, that's how important you are.

So forget all that foolish stuff. Forget about whether you're with the in-crowd or not. That doesn't matter. Forget whether people think you're so wonderful or they think you're not wonderful. Forget whether you're a swinger or not. Forget all that stupid circus stuff. Forget whether you're doing what everybody thinks a person of your age should do; forget that.

Do what your Maker has put you here to do. Do it with all your heart. Don't be haughty. Don't be preoccupied with these high things that everybody's praising. Don't be haughty and lifted up. Give yourself to little things and little people. Do some things faithfully that you alone can do. Whatever you are able to do, do it with all your heart and do it whether anybody sees you, whether nobody sees you, and forget yourself.

Forget yourself. Don't be conceited about yourself. Stop this business of thinking, "What are they thinking of me and how do I appear in other people's eyes", forget that. What does it matter? They'll be dead soon, won't matter. They'll go and they'll come with their praises and their criticism, with brickbats and their bouquets, they'll come and go, but forget that.

Forget how you appear to other people, realize that there is one dear one who is watching you and He knows fine well what He has given you. He knows exactly the abilities that He has given you and He has pleasure to get from you using those with all your heart and use them wherever. And maybe it's a good place to begin you know, with lowly things. Maybe that's a good place to begin.

There are all kinds of lowly things to be done. There are restrooms to be cleaned, there are. Can a restroom be a great blessing? It can, really, or it can be a great curse, you know it. You can express your love in making a restroom a blessing just as much as you can express your love by healing a person of cancer.

There are all kinds of little things to be done. There are little people in this neighborhood to be visited and handed a brochure telling them what Campus Church is about, that's it. There are little things to be done in this building that you could do. Little things that you could be faithful about week after week after week. Nobody might notice you, you might not get your name up in lights, you mightn't be thought of as a swinger, you mightn't be thought of as very popular or very wonderful but there's a dear Creator who sees every street sweeper.

There's a dear Creator who sees everyone that lifts up some dirt from the ground and He marks what you do and when you do it and He sees it and He has pleasure in His heart as you do. That's it. Do you see what we're doing? We're dumb. We're all so busy chasing our own tails that we have no time to do all the things that our Creator has for us to do, that's it.

We're all so busy with our binoculars out looking to see what's the popular thing to do and it's as if we're walking through a mound of dirt in our own room here looking to see what part of the world needs cleaned or looking to see who is the most popular cleaner. Loved ones, it's foolishness. Let's stop this preoccupation with being with the in-crowd. Let's stop being haughty. Let's stop being preoccupied with what people think are the important things to do.

Let's get down to doing the things that you and I can do and doing them faithfully. Do you realize how much of your life you have wasted up to the moment looking at other people? Our society must be the stupidest society that has ever lived, really. When you think of it, with due respect to John Wayne and the actors, who do we pay our great sums of money to? To actors and actresses who show us

what we're like. We love looking at ourselves. We do.

Really when you think of it, we pay the greatest sums of money to actors and actresses who in the movies and on the stage act our lives over so that it's like we just look in the mirror all day long. "Oh, I am wonderful. Oh, I am very funny." Really, little monkeys couldn't be dumber than we human beings and you know that that goes right through the whole life.

It gets to its funniest part, doesn't it, in a Jimmy Carson TV show when there we talk about the private lives of the people that we pay huge sums of money to act out our private lives for us. It gets to a ridiculous point where we're talking about the people, who're talking about the people, who're talking about the people who're talking about us, and yet all our magazines have the same emphasis, haven't they?

We're preoccupied with how we look, how we appear and we're all trying to be -what? And that's the subtle part of it, isn't it? You wonder who finally determines what we're all aiming at. You have a horrible feeling about who it is, don't you? You have a horrible suspicion that there's a prince of this world that has got a whole human race chasing its own tail, being preoccupied with how it looks to itself. Loved ones stop, it's just foolishness. Let's stop wasting our lives.

As you ask God this morning, "Lord, are there any things you'd like me to do?" the Spirit of God will speak in your conscience and will tell you, "Do those things", that's it. Whatever it is, whatever it is, something will occur to you. "Well I've been meaning to do that." Commit yourself to it. Give yourself to it for an hour every week. Do something that you really believe you should do in your own heart, whatever anybody else thinks of it and loved ones it's very real, really.

I don't know how many of you have been at a deathbed, but I suppose because of my situation, I've often been at deathbeds. It's a very real moment. It doesn't matter how close the wife is to the husband or how close the husband is to the wife. It doesn't matter how close the dad or the mom is to the son or daughter, the little one on that bed is on his own, on his own. You can reach out to them, you can hold the hand and I've held the hand of loved ones as they died. You can hold their hands, but there is a mighty gulf between you and them. They are in a different realm, a different world and that's the world that you and I, we'll all be in some day, you know.

It won't matter about the shouts of the crowd then, won't matter about the popularity, won't matter about what people thought of us. At that moment, you will need to have in your heart a sure confidence that you've done what your dear Father wanted you to do in this world and that you can look forward to meeting Him and thanking Him for the opportunity that He gave you to be real and to use the gifts that He has given you. So I'd encourage you to start right this day, start this day. Let us pray.

Dear God, we get caught up in these things and we apologize to you, Lord. The magazines and the newspapers and the TV and the movies seem to have such a pervasive influence upon us. We apologize Lord. We see that that's foolishness. We're like a lot of little monkeys looking at ourselves. Lord, we resolve now not to be haughty to stop looking at high things and wanting to be with the in-people and the popular people. Lord, forgive us.

We resolve Lord to give ourselves to the people that nobody else thinks about -- the little ones, little ones like ourselves, little ones who seem unimportant. And we commit ourselves to doing the things that nobody else thinks are important, the lowly tasks and the humble tasks. We intend this

week to look out for some of those and not to do them just for a week but commit ourselves to doing them week after week faithfully, year after year.

Then Lord, we resolve to stop being conceited about ourselves. We are nothing great. We are nothing but what you've made. Lord, we have no right to be conceited about ourselves. Everything we see in ourselves that may be good can only make us more grateful to you for your gifts. We're so unworthy of them. So Lord we thank you, and Lord Jesus, we thank you that when you died you took us with you to death and you put to death all the tendencies we have to want to be liked, to want to be approved of and to want to be popular.

So Lord now, we receive you into ourselves to be what you are in us. Your meat was to do the will of Him who sent you. Lord that's what we intend to do now, to live as our God made us to be here in this world so that on that final day we'll have nothing but gladness when the darkness settles over our eyes.

Now we commit ourselves to you for that purpose this day, and pray that you will start being able to be pleased with us whether people are pleased with us or not. We ask this for your glory. Now, the grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us, now and evermore. Amen.