

In the ✠ name of Jesus. Amen.

Last week, Jesus said, “*some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.*” And then this week, He taught, “*everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.*” What is going on here? If they weren't from Jesus' own mouth, we might think that the person who said these things was a bit off, maybe crazy or maybe being deceptive. It just sounds a bit like “*doublethink.*”

Doublethink ... have you heard it before? Do you know where it comes from? It comes from a book by the English author that has given rise to the adjective like Orwellian, from a book that has given us terms like “Big Brother” and “doublethink.” I'm talking about George Orwell's novel *1984*. He sets his dystopian novel in a province of earth called Oceania with its totalitarian society governed according to INGSOC, that is English Socialism. INGSOC was known for its Newspeak language filled with doublethink, like the three slogans of the Party: “WAR IS PEACE, FREEDOM IS SLAVERY, and IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH”. You can tell it was written by a Brit, for the government offices were called ministries. It wasn't the Department of Defense, but the Ministry of Peace, which really concerned itself with war. It wasn't the Department of Homeland Security, but the Ministry of Love, which was about maintaining law and order, but was really about surveillance—“Big Brother is watching you”—and coercion and torture. There were also the Ministry of Truth, which was really all about lies and rewriting history, and the Ministry of Plenty, which was really about managing starvation. And these were not accidental contradictions, we are told, or “ordinary hypocrisy: they [were] deliberate exercises in doublethink.”

So, is that what Jesus was doing in today's Gospel and last week's? Using doublethink? In Orwell's novel, this deliberate manipulation of the language was used for control. Another one of Big Brother's slogans was “Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past.” Control means power. With INGSOC, it was all about power. As Inner Party member O'Brien said to Winston, “The Party seeks power entirely for its own sake. We are not interested in the good of others; we are interested solely in power. Not wealth or luxury or long life or happiness; only power, pure power.” “Power is not a means; it is an end,” he said. “The object of power is power.”

Although the year 1984 has passed us by, it seems to me that this dystopian view of the future is being realized before our eyes. Thus all the frustration on display today. Don't you feel it, too? Being manipulated by politicians and corporations and major print and visual media and organizations? Telling half-truths and bald-faced lies; using doublethink. The powerbrokers prosecuting

faithful Christians, not for doing anything wrong, but for thinking and believing what the Bible says contrary to secular orthodoxy — thoughtcrimes, in the Newspeak of 1984, like LCMS member and judge Ruth Neely in Wyoming. And what is the purpose of all this? To control the masses. To gain power and maintain it. In the case of Judge Neely: “Just agree not to think and talk that way any more, agree to do same-sex ceremonies, and we’ll forget the whole thing.”

Brothers and sisters, do not put your trust in these things, government and corporations and so forth. The Psalmist says do not put your trust in man. Do not put your trust in princes. “[T]ake refuge in the LORD.” Take refuge in Him who promises to carry your burdens and give you rest.

To be sure, Jesus says some confusing things at times in His ministry, that sometimes seem like contradictions: like “*everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.*” But the first thing to remember is that when Jesus says these things, it is not about power; it is not to “*lord it over [you].*” That’s what “*those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles,*” do, and that’s what “*their great ones*” do. They “*exercise authority.*” Theirs is an exercise of power, and when power is the goal, then the means to achieve that power can become corrupt.

But Jesus said, “*it shall not be so among you.*” In fact, just the opposite of exercising power and authority, Jesus tells His disciples “*whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.*” That’s not doublethink, but what some call the Great Reversal of Christianity. And that shines a light on what Jesus said in our Gospel lesson today, doesn’t it: “*he who humbles himself will be exalted*”?

And it’s not that humbling yourself will exalt you on earth; making yourself servant and slave of all won’t make you great on earth. You won’t get all the accolades. You won’t get the parades. But in the end humbling yourself in repentance and faith, loving and serving others as you have been loved and served, and you will receive something more precious; you will receive the crown of everlasting life.

For this is what Jesus means when He says things like “*he who humbles himself will be exalted.*” He means first to point us to Himself: “*the Son of Man [who] came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*” He means to point us to Himself, who “*did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*”

This is the way God works. Not in doublethink, but in concealed ways, as Solomon teaches. Not in ways that exhibit earthly power and authority, but in things that are considered foolishness by the world, and weak, you know, “*the word of the cross.*” For “*we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,*” but this “*foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*” Indeed, God chose this foolishness not to be called wise, but “*to shame the wise.*” God chose this weakness not to gain power, but “*to shame the strong.*” “*God chose what is low and despised in the world,*” not to exercise His authority, but “*to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast*” in himself before God.

For this is the way God wants us to operate also: having the same mind as Christ had in His humility, not seeking power or control (I know Christians are accused of that all the time—that they’re power grabbers; may it never be); not even seeking to justify ourselves, but having been justified by faith in Christ, we follow in His servant example. Therefore, we seek to help others, especially the weakest, even if societal norms say otherwise or unjust regulations try to prevent us. And don’t do it seeking earthly honor and glory. Jesus teaches that when He tells a parable about a wedding banquet, “*Don’t seat yourself in the place of honor,*” He said, “*but at the lowest place.*” Don’t do it that you might gain something back — you might indeed feel satisfaction in doing for others, but that’s not the Christian motivation. The motivation is the servant Christ, as Jesus says again, when you have a banquet, don’t invite those of a certain status who can pay you back, but “*invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, BECAUSE THEY CANNOT REPAY YOU. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.*”

James echoes Jesus’ words when he says, “*Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.*” That exaltation may not be on earth, but you in faith will indeed be exalted. Even as God “*highly exalted [Jesus] and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,*” so will He exalt with a heavenly reward all those who “*confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*”

Still, we don’t like that this is what salvation takes: humility and suffering and cross and death. We know the Biblical story, but we don’t naturally like it, because we want to think we can do it on our own. But we don’t do it, and we can’t. We are ultimately weak. In 1984, Julia and Winston thought they could withstand Big Brother’s torturous onslaught. Winston naively said, “They could lay bare in the utmost detail everything that you had done or said or thought, but the inner heart, whose workings were mysterious even to yourself, remained impregnable.” He was wrong. Winston thought that he would sacrifice himself before betraying Julia

to the Ministry of Love. He was wrong. Winston discovered that sacrificing oneself was easier thought than done. He thought, “yes, he would suffer to save Julia.” But in the end, he betrayed her to save himself.

Are we any different? I think not. Thus we rejoice in Jesus and His humiliation for us, for that's why God sent His Son as Savior: because we are weak, but He is strong, and He willingly endured the shame and torture and pains of the cross all the way to death. Therefore, trusting not in ourselves, we can “*boast all the more gladly of [our] weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon [us].*” And we can be “*content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities,*” for Jesus says to us, not in doublethink but in words clarion clear, “*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*” Yes, trusting in Christ Jesus, “*when I am weak, then I am strong.*”

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.