

**David Johnson Rowe: “Pride”**  
**August 15, 2021**

Believe it or not,  
what a great visit we had to Spain!  
As Alida said – pre positive Covid test *and* post positive Covid test –  
she said “these were the best two weeks of my life!”  
And she’s had a good life!

As with many of us who travel,  
part of the fun is using the languages we took in high school –  
French, Italian, German –  
and for today’s young people, Arabic, Chinese, Swahili!

For me, on this trip, I could try to put eight years of high school and college  
Spanish to good use.

In fact, on my last day in Madrid,  
with Alida quarantined,  
I went to a favorite old church and, as is my custom,  
knelt to pray at a side chapel.  
And I decided to do my whole long prayer ... in Spanish.  
Halting, yes.  
Misspoken here and there, yes.  
Mixed up verb tenses, definitely.

But I prayed long and hard.  
For you, our little church;  
for Alida, that she’d get better quick;  
for me and my flight home;  
for Heath Smith, who died while we were away;  
for Peggy McCain, who had a bad fall;  
for Katherine Hansen and Diane Atkins,

and their daughters from our church family: Barbara Mayer and Katie Holland.

And a lot more.

It was a long prayer.

ALL in Spanish.

I was rather proud of myself!

Of course, most impressive Spanish was used on the day we learned Alida had Covid.

The new, exotic, Delta variant, breakthrough Covid.

The kind of Covid that says

“NO, you can’t go to Barcelona tomorrow and catch that train to Paris for three days in Paris

before you go to Prague for two more weeks.

Nope. Uh-uh.”

The kind of Covid that says,

“Alida, you sit in your room alone for ten days,  
and David, because you’re at-risk OLD, you fly home alone.”

That kind of Covid.

That’s where my Spanish kicked in.

Let me share it with you.

The first word is easy: YO.

It means “I”, “me.” Yo, I.

The next word is “estoy.”

I means “I am,” but you put “Yo” in front of it for emphasis.

Yo estoy.

And third word is “estupido,”  
which is the universal easily-translated idea of being thoroughly an idiot.

Yo estoy estúpido.

It means: I am really, *really*, REALLY stupid.

I used that with the hotel manager when I explained why a happy couple suddenly needed two separate rooms,  
and why Alida would be staying in hers alone for an extra ten days.

I used that with the room service coordinator, the cleaning lady,  
the local coffee house, and the check-in counter person at the airport  
who asked why I was leaving my wife in Spain.

Yo estoy estúpido.

You see, we were in Spain because of my simple-minded, self-obsessed,  
prideful arrogance.

Not to get too political or anything, but I am pro-science, pro-vaccine, pro-Mask, pro-Dr. Fauci, pro-CDC, pro being careful and wise.

Sure, we've taken risks, but for a higher cause.

We've been with the sick and dying, in hospitals and nursing homes,  
we've run a church life that successfully straddled  
that narrow dividing line between being wise and cautious,  
and being open and available.

Despite all that, I said  
“Let's go to Spain and Paris!!”

It's our Tenth wedding anniversary this year,  
it's Alida's thirty-second year as your pastor,  
the longest serving in history.

A lot to celebrate.

Yep, let's go to Spain and Paris, I said.  
It's summer, it's hot, people are staying away in droves.  
But there's a hotel in Madrid Alida loves,  
heck, Alida once said that she could LIVE at that hotel!

I knew we could do this.  
I knew it would be fine.  
I knew, because, well, I know everything.  
That's the Number One side product of pride, arrogance, and ego.  
*I know better.*

Better than Fauci ... than the US Embassy Travel Advisory ...  
than simple math or common sense or looking at the numbers.

Yo estoy estúpido.

The most famous verse in the Bible about pride  
is so popular that most people don't know it's from the Bible.  
"Pride goeth before the fall."  
Proverbs 16:18.  
Pride ... goeth ... before ... the fall.

First, you fill yourself up with pride.  
You "puff yourself up", the Bible says elsewhere.  
You're so full of yourself that you can't see your own downfall waiting for  
you.

First comes pride ... then comes the fall.

And when that fall comes, you can't help but say  
"yo estoy stupido!"

If Governor Cuomo was a member of our church  
I bet I would have sat with him a lot in this past year or so,  
as he stumbled toward his fall.

All that pride – it's not Republican or Democrat,  
pride is personal,  
ego is personal.

All that pride comes out in  
how you treat staff,  
how you treat women,  
how you treat people,  
how you treat critics and crises.

You're invincible.  
You know better.

You see that?

Pride comes first.  
Then the fall.

Like many things in life, pride has an up side, and a downside.  
The great Yankee Hall of Famer Lou Gehrig  
is known to this day as "The Pride of the Yankees."

His character,  
his work ethic,  
his value system  
his very being was someone to be proud of,  
someone to look up to.

And it's okay to be proud of your own efforts,  
your own accomplishments,  
to take pride in yourself,  
in your very being,  
in our character,  
in the way you carry yourself  
and conduct yourself.

There's a whole worldwide movement now  
known by the simple word PRIDE.  
Be true to yourself.  
Don't be ashamed.  
Lift your head up.  
God made you beautifully.

But what is the dividing line between the up side and the downside of Pride?

Well, one of those verses at the end of our scripture litany says  
*Do not think more highly of yourself than you ought.*

May I repeat that?  
*Do not think more highly of yourself  
than you ought to.*

It's good to know what you're made of,  
what you're capable of,

what your strengths are,  
where your talents lie.

It's good to have great expectations and high standards.  
It's good to have an honest sense of yourself.

But don't over do it.  
Don't "puff yourself up."  
Don't pad your resumé.  
Don't fool yourself.  
Don't overlook those blind spots.  
We all have them.

I love that double verse we used in the litany,  
"do not be wise in your own eyes... for there is more hope for a fool than for  
such a person!"

That's all about knowing your limits and your blind spots.

For me?  
It was all about getting Alida to Spain, on to Paris,  
the trip of a lifetime,  
a reward for sticking with me for ten years,  
and sticking around here with you for thirty-two years.  
So, full speed ahead, blind spots be damned.

We all know the story of David and Goliath.  
Goliath was literally a giant,  
a world champion Olympic gold medal soldier for the Philistines –  
the biggest, baddest, strongest dude in the world.

David was just a shepherd boy,

a teenager,  
a total neophyte,  
not even a soldier.

Goliath went out to the battlefield day after day,  
taunting the Israelites,  
mocking their soldiers,  
daring them to send one person for a man-to-man  
winner-take-all.

The original mixed martial arts octagon match to the death.

Only little David accepted the challenge.

Goliath ridiculed David,  
laughed at his youth,  
and puffed himself up so proud that he couldn't see his fall coming.  
He couldn't see  
or take into account  
little David  
kneeling down in a riverbed, picking up few smooth stones,  
filling his slingshot,  
and letting it rip –  
right in Goliath's forehead.

First, Goliath's pride,  
his ego-driven blinding pride ...  
and then the fall.  
Literally.  
Goliath fell down to the ground, dead.

Pride, vanity, ego and arrogance.  
All versions of just plain *Yo estoy estúpido!*



The opposite of pride is humility,  
and you'll see that in the scriptures for today,  
and a thousand others I could show you.  
God understands the power of humility.

In sports, we call a humble athlete "coachable."  
In business, a humble worker is "all ears," willing to learn  
In the classroom a humble student is "teachable."  
In life, a humble person never stops improving,  
never stops growing.

So OK, yeah, I'm humbled.  
I am estúpido.

But Spain was still amazing.  
I don't want you feeling bad for us.  
We saw a lot. We learned a lot. We rejoiced a lot.  
We wandered the halls of the great Prado Art Museum,  
almost alone.  
We stood in front of Picasso's powerful antiwar painting *Guernica* --  
nobody near us.  
We had the great medieval cathedrals  
of Leon (*Lay-on*) and Toledo (*Toe-lay-do*) to ourselves.  
We walked the magnificent gardens and parks  
just us, a few birds and a lot of flowers.

So history, art, beauty, food and fun. Not a bad two weeks!  
I'll close with one highlight. To end on an upbeat.  
We took three side trips out of Madrid.  
To Toledo, an old castle town,  
with a most magnificent cathedral,

And a treasure trove of El Greco,  
my now favorite painter.

And to Burgos,  
another ancient Spanish kingdom,  
once home to the famous *El Cid*  
and its own exquisite cathedral.

But our highlight was Leon (*Lay-own*)  
yet again a historic, stunning cathedral,  
called the “House of Light” –  
the largest collection of ancient stained glass windows  
in the world – from the 1200’s!

We were looking at sunlight,  
streaming through the windows.  
the original windows of 800 years ago.  
It was all as stunning and beautiful and magnificent  
as any of us could imagine.

And that wasn't even the best part!

A family from our church,  
the Alfagemes (*Alpha – hay -mays*)  
Santiago, Leah, Santi Jr and Isabella,  
they hosted us for a day.

Santiago grew up in Leon.

His parents still live there, just around the corner from the cathedral.

And, amazingly, they happened to be in Leon right then,  
visiting from Connecticut.

So they walked us around Leon,  
filling us with stories.

And the best part?

the best, BEST part?

Better than the Cathedral with 800-year-old stained glass windows?  
Better than a dozen different tapas at a local restaurant?  
Better than living history?

Santiago took us to his childhood church,  
the church where he was baptized,  
grew up,  
took first communion.

*Older* than the cathedral.  
Romanesque in style,  
built before engineers had figured out how to do flying buttresses  
and big round domes  
and weight-bearing frames that could hold gigantic stained glass windows.

Before all that progress of 800 years ago,  
*before* that,  
came Santiago's little family church.

If you've ever been to Spain,  
or watched Rick Steves' travel videos,  
you know about Catholic Holy Week processions in Spain.

Much more elaborate,  
much more religious,  
much more emotional than Mardi Gras in New Orleans.

During Holy Week, the week before Easter,  
all the churches in a city like Leon  
process their sacred statues.  
Gigantic statues of Jesus bearing his cross,

or of the grieving Mary.

Each statue built on a large platform,  
each platform and statue carried on the shoulders of twenty church members,  
processing for hours over narrow cobblestone streets.

Standing in Santiago's little church,  
he pointed to the statue of the Virgin Mary.  
"That is what I carried each Holy Week," Santiago said,  
remembering the pride and honor of all those years ago.

Ancient faith, in an ancient church, ancient history –  
but alive today in us.

And Alida and I felt a rush,  
a sweet joy, just to be there with Santiago.

We don't get to do that sort of thing much.  
I'd love to do that with each of you,  
to have you take me to your home church,  
to say  
"see, that's where I was baptized...  
and right there, that's where I was in the Christmas pageant ...  
and up there, that's where we were married."

Those old memories, those old touchstones of faith,  
those old stories still so very much alive in us.

I was reading the obituary of the great Italian  
publisher and "renaissance man of letters,"  
as the New York Times called Robert Calasso.

*His whole career was devoted to understanding humanity's search for transcendence, "ebbrezza" in Italian, "rapture," that feeling that we have been brought close to God.*

[NY Times 8/1/21 p. 19]

We felt that every day in Spain.  
We felt that in El Greco's paintings,  
in the startling cathedrals,  
and in Santiago's little family church in Leon.

That's a pretty good two weeks.

Even if I was – or in Spanish, *yo fue* –  
estupido.