



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

During the past Sundays our morning Gospel lessons have been moving us through the Gospel of Luke.

In Luke 14 Jesus told his disciples about the “Cost of being a disciple.” In chapters 15 and 16 Jesus taught about God’s love and desire to find those who are spiritually lost and so there is the story of the “Lost Sheep”, the “Lost Coin” and the “Lost Sons”. In Chapter 16 Jesus confronted the Pharisees regarding our ultimate destiny; heaven or hell. He tells the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

In Chapter 17 Jesus talks about the consequences of sin and the challenge to practice forgiveness with one another. In Chapter 18 Jesus teaches his disciples about the necessity of persistence and faith in prayer. He tells the parable of the Widow and the Unjust Judge. WOW! These chapters are just filled with great teachings by Jesus.

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus tells another parable contrasting two men who went to the temple to pray. There is another lesson in this text that is good for all to hear.

But first a story.

Vince Lombardi as you all know, was the coach of the Green Bay Packers during their glory years in the 1960’s. Lombardi was known for his monstrous ego, unwavering self-confidence, and gargantuan pride. Stories about Lombardi abound, some fact, some fiction. One story tells of the occasion when Lombardi was at a championship playoff game. His wife was not able to attend the game. The odds were against the Packers winning the game, but they won the game anyhow. Coach Lombardi was thrilled with his team’s winning effort. When he got home, his wife was already in bed fast asleep. But when his ice-cold feet touched her legs, she said, “God, your feet are cold.” Quick as a flash, Lombardi replied, “When we are in bed, just call me Vince.”

Pride has been elevated to the level of a virtue in the world of American sports and in the entertainment industry. We chuckle about stories of proud people, like Lombardi's cold feet. But we are nauseated when we come face to face with an arrogant person who looks down their nose at us like we are a lower form of life.

C.S. Lewis calls pride a spiritual cancer that eats up the very possibility of love and contentment, and even common sense. Pride after all is one of the 7 deadly sins. Pride is a spiritual cancer that damages our souls, harms everyone in its path and breaks God's heart!

Jesus condemns the sin of pride in the parable of the Pharisee and Tax Collector because he knows what an inaccurate picture such arrogant pride can bring.

True greatness in God's eyes comes not in exalting ourselves over others. True greatness comes in humbling ourselves as servants of others. Christ exemplified humility in humbling Himself in becoming a man, a human man, and dying on the cross. He gave all He had to give us. He gave us forgiveness, abundant and eternal life. Christ exemplified humility. The Bible says in several places pride goes before the fall.

Did you know that the word humility comes from the word humus, which means soil or dirt? God created us out of the dust of the earth. One day we all return to the dirt once again. And we are what we are by the grace of God. What I mean by that is that even though we have a humble beginning a dirt beginning, real humility is a recognition of divine action through our lives. God is at work in us and through us. The danger we have to overcome is a pride that tries to elevate ourselves to the level of God. When our pride gets in the way we begin to think that we are gods in our own little world. This sort of arrogant pride is destructive and not at all what God created us for. But there are things we can do to live in humble pride each day.

The first thing we can do is to recognize that Jesus calls us to humility. Through this parable we clearly see the need to look to God for help. We are not to lift up ourselves but rather to realize that our power comes through and from Christ. This challenge of the parable is not to put ourselves down, but to lift our need for God up. Humble pride is honest about our need for God. After all God knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows the real you and me, even the darkest of our dark sides. And still, he loves us anyway.

Secondly, we should focus on God's mercy and not our own achievements. Our parable has the Pharisee retelling all the wonderful things he has done to stay faithful while the tax collector simply realizes that he is a sinner. We realize that we need to focus on finding our purpose in life. That we do by having a relationship with God. He then will give us the power to fulfill this awesome purpose of enjoying the life and love He gives us freely, through the grace of Jesus. Our humble pride focuses on the incredible grace of God.

The third thing we can do is to see others through the eyes of God. Our parable tells of the Pharisee and how he belittled the others by saying he was not like them. And C.S. Lewis quote, "A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you're looking down, you cannot see something that's above you." Oh, how true when the eye is on me, I miss the God above me. WOW

And lastly remember that life is not about how I compare to others, it is about my relationship with God. In the oval office when Ronald Regan was president, there sat on his desk a sign that read, "There is no limit to what a man can do or where he can go if he doesn't mind who gets the credit." Great quote! And God deserves all the credit.

God does not call us to a life compared with others. He calls us to an abundant life centered on a relationship with Him.

So, remember: Be honest about your need for God. Focus on God's mercy not your achievements. Always try to see others through God's eyes where there is no need for competing with others. And do not be afraid to pray, "Lord keep me humble."

I really related to the last paragraph in our Gospel lesson today as told by Eugene Pederson in his Biblical paraphrase called the Message.

"Jesus commented, "This tax man, not the other, went home made right with God. If you walk around with your nose in the air, you're going to end up flat on your face, but if you're content to be simply yourself, you will become more than yourself."

I am sure many of you have heard stories like this before. It is about a young man who, in the commission of a crime, killed another young man. The victim's family wanted justice, of course. During the trial, the parents wanted the opportunity to talk with the young man. As they got to know him, their hearts began to warm toward him, and they started to forgive him. After he was convicted, the victim's parents offered a character witness for him. They asked for the judge leniency. When he was in jail, they came and visited him. When he got out, they became his adoptive parents of sorts. He became a Christian through their witness. He said, "Christians are the oddest people in the world. You kill their son, and they adopt you into their family."

That is what God has done for us. It was our sin that sent Jesus to the cross. It was because of us that Jesus died. But it was all part of God's miraculous plan to save us because we could not save ourselves. Through Jesus' death, we have been adopted into His family. God isn't impressed with those that try to get to heaven on their own but rather has mercy on those that understand their unworthiness before God.

Let us pray, a short prayer by Blaise Pascal, "Lord, help me to do great things as though they were little, since I do them with your power, and little things as though they were great, since I do them in your name." **AMEN.**