

**In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

**Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen**

**Eleventh Sunday after Trinity (2022)**

**Don't Be an Uncompassionate Pharisee**

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***“He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt:” (Luke 18:9, ESV)***

The Gospel Reading for today is St. Luke's continuation of our Lord's conversation with a group of Pharisee's who came to Him asking ***“when the kingdom of God would come?” (Luke 17:20, ESV)*** In answering, Jesus said, ***“The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.” (Luke 17:20–21, ESV)*** The kingdom of God is among us, with us, and in us who are true believers of Christ who humbly turn to Him in repentance seeking forgiveness of our sins. But to the Pharisee, the self-righteous, the arrogant, Jesus says, ***“The days are coming when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it.” (Luke 17:22, ESV)*** Shocking! The Pharisee's were unable to see the days of the Son of Man. They were blinded by their self-righteousness, a condition that separated them from true faith in the Son of God. But this condition could be overcome by the Holy Spirit through prayer and repentance, through confession and absolution. Thus, to give them hope, and to answer our Lord's question regarding His return on judgment day, whether ***“he [will] find faith on earth?” (Luke 18:8, ESV)*** or not, Jesus tells them a series of parables meant to lead them to prayer and give them hope (Luke 18:1). One of these parables is our Gospel Reading for today: the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector.

The self-righteous believe they can enter the kingdom of God from a position of self-made superiority, but Jesus shows us in this parable that entry into the kingdom of God is from a position of inferiority, such as the sinful tax collector whose prayer is evidence of the faith Christ hopes to find when He returns in judgment (Luke 18:8). In this parable Jesus shows us those who are true disciples and those who are not.

God's Word is steadfast in showing us the contrast between Pharisee's and tax collectors, between the self-righteous sinner who trusts in his ability to fulfill the Law for salvation, and the repentant sinner who trusts in the redeeming sacrifice of God's holy Son upon the Altar of the Cross for the forgiveness of sins. Living by faith in the meritorious work of Christ Jesus for salvation, the true disciple of Christ rejects salvation by works, thereby rejecting the faith of the Pharisee.

The scene is set, two men standing in the Temple, approaching God in prayer with two very different attitudes.

The Pharisee, filled with himself, stands in a prominent place to be seen by all. He is self-assured, self-reliant, self-righteous, smug, and arrogant. Instead of offering his prayer in silence, he prays out loud so all can hear him, saying, ***“God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.” (Luke 18:11–12, ESV)*** His prayer shows that he is an elitist. His prayer is meant to show others his piety. He wants to impress those around him. His petition is in the first person “I.” I am not like these others. I fast, and I give tithes. His prayer is not petitionary but

eucharistic, giving thanks to God for who he is but not for the gifts God has given him. His prayer contains no petitions for himself or others, but rather it is all about him, how perfect he is, especially that he is not like the tax collector.

The tax collector on the other hand stands aside, at a distance, in the shadows so not to be seen by anyone. He is conscious of his sin. Aware of his sinfulness, the tax collector comes humbly before God, he does not even raise his eyes toward heaven as he beats his chest in a sign of unworthiness and contrition. This reminds us of what the crowd did when returning home after witnessing our Lord's crucifixion, they went home, ***"beating their breasts."*** (Luke 23:48, ESV) This was their act of contrition. They knew it was their unbelief that caused the suffering and death of God's holy Son. Thus, the tax collector's remorseful, contrition leads him to pray, ***"God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"*** (Luke 18:13, ESV) A simple, yet powerful prayer. Please God, forgive me. His prayer is the prayer of a true believer. His prayer reflects the faith of those who yearned for the Messiah to come to His Temple, to make the final atoning sacrifice for the sins of the people. He comes before God and begs Him to be merciful to him, a sinner!

The tax collector doesn't see himself as a sinner among other sinners. No! He sees himself as the guilty one, he sees himself as the embodiment of all sinners. He does not compare himself to others, he does not claim superiority, instead he confesses that he is the worst of all. In his words we hear the voice of St. Paul who confessed to St. Timothy, ***"The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life."*** (1 Timothy 1:15–16, ESV) Such is the voice and the prayer of a true disciple of Christ.

Elitism is a real problem for it raises up Pharisee's in the secular world and in the Church. Pious, self-righteous people filled with themselves who consider themselves superior to others, who look down on others, who slander, manipulate, and denigrate others and they are a constant problem in this world. Elite Pharisee's believe they are God's gift to men. They believe they have the answer to all that ails the world or the Church. Thus, their desire is to foist their mandates on to others. They must govern, they must rule. Oh, I know how you should live. Oh, I know how you should be educated. Oh, I know all there is to know about making your life better. Just ask me. You should listen to me because I am superior to you.

This was very much the attitude of the Pharisee's of the Temple, only their superiority was carried out through the Law of God. Believing they, and only they could fulfill the Law of God, they looked down on the common man. Believing they, and only they could rightly interrupt the Word of God, they found themselves in constant conflict with Jesus. Their approach to life in general and especially in the church was that they were the only arbiters of truth. But their self-righteousness, their elitism didn't really set them apart from the others. Truth is, they were still sinners, like all men, but their smugness and their rejection of the vicarious satisfaction of Jesus brought them a disaster of their own making, the wrath of God.

This is the problem of elitism; it fails to recognize sin. Oh, it sees the sins of others, but never their sin. This is why the Pharisee could pray as he did. He could not recognize his sin. Believing he was perfect; he basked in his self-perfection and derided all those who he considered less than himself. This elite Pharisee had one goal, to gain heaven by his works. Thus, all he could see regarding his faith was his foolish understanding that by his works, his merit, he would do all that was necessary to please God. Obey the Law, give tithes, fast, and so forth. But the question must be asked, did he really obey the Law? Did he love his neighbor as he did himself? Not according to our Lord.

The Pharisee prayed, ***“Thank you that I am not like other men . . . [that I am not] like this tax collector.” (Luke 18:11, ESV)*** Thank you God that I am superior to all others. What a smug and unloving prayer. But this is the prayer of the Pharisee whether in the secular world or the church. They are always comparing themselves to others. Always considering themselves superior, they seek to lord over, to rule, and to reject the opinions of others. Nothing says Pharisee better today than the word elitism.

However, in the Church which Jesus founded we must remember the words of Jesus in his first encounter with these Pharisee’s.

Jesus was invited by Matthew to a great feast at his house after the Lord had called him to be an apostle. Since Matthew was a tax collector, naturally many of his guest at the feast were also tax collectors. This didn’t sit well with the Pharisee’s who were also in attendance. St. Luke tells us, ***“The Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” And Jesus answered them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”” (Luke 5:30–32, ESV)*** Table fellowship with sinners characterized the total essence of our Lord’s entire ministry, it was at the center of His controversy with the religious establishment, particularly the Pharisees. Why would the Son of Man, the Messiah, sit and eat with the poor, the marginalized, with sinners? The Pharisee’s believed that such as these were hopelessly excluded from the kingdom of God. Thus, they were outraged when Jesus told them the kingdom of God was not for them. It was not for those who considered themselves superior to others. It was not for those who thought they could save themselves by their works. It was not for the self-righteous.

Truth is, the Pharisee’s had forgotten, God desires mercy not sacrifice. God, speaking through the prophet Hosea, said, ***“I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.” (Hosea 6:6, ESV)*** And Jesus, sitting at table with Matthew, told the Pharisee’s ***“Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” (Matthew 9:13, ESV)***

The Son of God, our Lord, and Savior Jesus Christ, came to save sinners like us. He came to save the sinner who cries out, ***“God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” (v. 13)***, or who cries out, ***“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.” (Psalm 51:1 ESV)*** The one who prays, ***“Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me” (Psalm 51:2-3 ESV)***. Such is the penitent sinner, the tax collector, the true disciple of Christ who knows the only satisfaction for sin is the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus upon the Altar of the Cross. There, and there alone, God offers forgiveness for our sins. Not in our works, not in our superior attitude, not in our self-righteousness, but only in the life, death, and resurrection of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. There, on the Altar of the Cross, our Lord appeased God’s wrath against our sin and God, because of His love for His Son, His holy sacrifice on the Altar of the Cross, opened His heart to all men, offering them forgiveness, justifying them for the sake of His Son, Jesus Christ.

In closing the parable Jesus said of the tax collector, ***“I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 18:14, ESV)***

Nowhere in this blessed salvation won for all by God’s Holy Son, do we see the work of men. Nowhere in the forgiveness offered to the world do we see forgiveness being earned by the merit of men; we see only the merit of Christ. There is no room for elitism in the Church of Christ, no

room for sanctimonious prayer, testimony, or edicts. There is only room for the Word of God, especially the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus Christ. God will not have us rely on anything else, nothing external to His Word, nothing predicated on the word of men. As true disciples of Christ we are to rely on and trusts solely in His Word. There is no other foundation for true faith than Jesus Christ and Him crucified for the forgiveness of our sins. Thus, seek the forgiveness that comes from Christ and not your own understanding, nor your self-righteousness. Cleave solely to the Word of the Gospel, for it alone reveals our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the one and only Savior of mankind, the one and only Savior of humble sinners.

Seek Christ where He can be found, here, in His Church. In His Church you will receive that which He so desires to pour out on you His mercy, His grace, and His forgiveness. So, like the tax collector, come filled with humble repentance confess your sins and receive His forgiveness that you may go to your house forgiven, justified, accepted, and saved. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen