

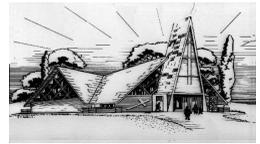


Free Evangelical Lutheran
Synod in South Africa

Sermon - 23rd Sunday after Pentecost

(Proper 25C)

*In humble Repentance, Faith lives by
Grace and Mercy and is exalted by God in
Christ!*



St. John's Lutheran Parish Shelly Beach

• The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Luke 18, 9-17:

- **ESV 9** And He also said to some who were trusting in themselves that they were righteous and who were despising others this parable:
- **10** “Two men went up into the temple in order to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.
- **11** The Pharisee, having taken his stand by himself, began to pray these things, ‘O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of men—seizing, unrighteous, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.
- **12** I fast twice a week; I pay tithes on everything I obtain.’
- **13** “But the tax collector, standing at a distance, would not even raise his eyes into heaven, but he kept beating his chest, saying, ‘O God, be propitiated toward me, the sinner.’
- **14** “I say to you, this man went down to his home having been declared righteous, instead of that one, because everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”
- **15** And they tried to bring to Him even the infants in order that He might touch them. But when the disciples saw this, they kept rebuking them.
- **16** But Jesus called for them by saying, “Release the little children to come to me and stop preventing them, for of such as these is the kingdom of God.
- **17** Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a child will not enter into it.”
- *Let us pray: Come Holy Spirit, open our ears and our hearts so that we realise that we are sinners, the sinners, that ask for and receive the mercy of God in His new temple, the Body of Christ! Amen.*

• **Dear Congregation in Christ!**

- When the Son of man comes, will He find the Faith on earth? Jesus answers this question in that He shows that if the Faith will be found on earth it will be found in the most unlikely persons, namely in the swindlers, unjust, adulterers, tax-collectors, in summary we can say, all people who are genuine sinners, adults who have nothing to offer God, who have no standing in front of Him and confess it before God! And, the Faith will also be found in little infants who have been brought to Jesus to enter the kingdom of God!
- In the parable, the well-known one, about the Pharisee and the Tax-collector, Jesus reveals the reason why this will be so.

• Two men went to the temple to pray. This connects with the theme of prayer. Both came to pray in the temple. So, what these two are doing, both would refer to as praying. But, the content of their prayer- the actual words they say- reveals their theology which flows from their hearts! And the contrast couldn't be more stark.

• The Pharisee prayed first- standing, and with respect to himself he was praying the following: *“O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of men—seizing, unrighteous, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.”* What was he saying? He started off by thanking God. He thanked God that he was not like the rest of men- and he referred to the rest as greedy swindlers, unrighteous or evil, adulterers or even as this tax-collector who stole from the government and from the people and were justly despised for this. He thanked God for not being like the rest of mankind who are as he described.

• So, what was he doing? He was exalting himself above all others and even thanking God for being better than the rest! How did he see himself before God? ‘I am not as bad as those others’. He had no doubt that he was righteous before God. And he names the proof of the pudding, his works, *“I fast twice a week; I pay tithes on everything I obtain”!* Now, looking at the works he named, only, he seemed to be doing more than was required of him. But, what is missing and wrong in his assessment?

• He takes his own assessment as being the truth, as being God's assessment! But, what is God's assessment: He exalted himself and therefore he will be humbled on the Last Day. Jesus reveals God's assessment, God's application of the Law: Whoever put himself higher than others doesn't have the right Faith, because he trusts in himself! The Pharisee of all times and of all generations claims to be righteous according to his own interpretation of the Law of God! He refuses to see that he too is a genuine sinner, especially in the heart! He is in denial of his true sinfulness! He is proud of himself the way he is! He is so confident that he is fine! He doesn't need confession and Absolution of sins. He is just fine!

• So, why did he come to the temple?

• He came to the temple to exalt himself, to show-off his high position before God. He almost expected God to clap His hands because he came to the temple! Its almost as if he was doing God a favour to have come to the temple! This was revealed by the content of his worship, even by his posture in the temple.

• In absolutely stark contrast the tax-collector came to pray in the temple. He stood far off- ashamed of himself, not worthy to be in the presence of God- keeping his eyes down and beating his breast- like some of those did in the hour when Jesus died on the cross. He was saying: *“O God, be propitiated toward me, the sinner.”* He did not come to give God something. He came to confess that he

is *the* sinner, not simply a sinner, but the worst one! He humbled himself. He put himself below all others. He desperately needed something from God. He needed nothing less than God's atonement! That's how bad he was! We know what that stands for: He needed the death of Jesus to make atonement for him.

- Please take note, he called himself "the sinner". He not only did sinful things. He IS sinful. His whole being is sinful. That is why he can only sin! Furthermore, notice how he gives no excuses. The Pharisee accused him of being a sinner. He did not try and justify himself! He agreed with the Pharisee on the fact of his own sinfulness, and he was not proud about it. He rather stood at the back.

- Yet, he did draw on God's promise, the promise that He will have mercy on the sinners, on those who humble themselves.

- The outcome of the parable is absolutely wonderful for the sinner, but for the Pharisee it is devastating. God exalts the sinner whilst God humbles the Pharisee. Here we have it again, the Great Reversal. The one who humbles himself will be exalted by God! The one who realises that the Law of God accuses him will not see himself higher than others. The one who misuses the Law of God to justify or excuse or even to show- off how blessed he is, will look down on the real sinners!

- Dear congregation, this parable of Jesus preaches the doctrine of original sin that all people are sinners and I am *the* utmost sinner! This doctrine is hated and rejected by the world like nothing else. It is especially hated by the intellectuals of the world because it teaches that there is nothing good in us, that is in our old Adam! It goes completely against humanism's highest hope, that there is something good in everyone! We have to see why so much depends on this!

- Well, if by definition you only have your self, no good God, there better be something good in you otherwise all hope of improving life in this world would be futile! All hope of genuine ethical and moral evolution would be fake! That would kill all ideals!

- If you really think about it, the Pharisees practised something like modern "positive thinking". Concentrate on your strengths. Don't let your weaknesses pull you down. You have to believe in yourself!

- If there are no good persons in the world, if all are sinners, in their core, in their being, before God, how can this world survive? How can there still be life on this planet?

- Remember the OT Reading about Cain and Abel? The first recorded murder. Right from the beginning, after the Fall into Sin, this is what people did with one another- and it still goes on! Cain did not repent! Instead, he complained with God about the harshness of His punishment as he realised that the consequences of what he did were far too much for him to bear. What happened? Who jumped in?

God jumped in and declared that vengeance belongs to Him. Therefore, He made a mark on Cain to protect him by Law that whoever would kill him would receive the full vengeance of God.

- So, what does this teach us? Life on this earth is possible because God controls the world through His Law. However, we should not be too idealistic about improvements in the moral standard of human beings!
- The tax-collector spoke the truth about his self and he relied completely on God to be all good, to be merciful and trustworthy! He was ashamed of being the sinner, but at the same time he hoped in God's atonement! This is what he confessed! He completely counted on God's Way of salvation! So, if we confess together with that tax-collector we can say:
- We will not be disappointed on the Last Day. Our old Adam, our inborn desire, is a complete mess, in God's eyes. We were born in sin. But, because we were united with Christ's atonement in Baptism- our old Adam died and was crucified, he was humbled, God will exalt our new Life in Christ! We will not be exalted by other people. Not by ourselves. We will continue to realistically face our own sinfulness. The game of playing positive thinking is fake. As baptised believers in Christ we don't need it. Instead, we face the truth about ourselves. That keeps us humble.
- Yet, we don't despair, because God has given us a new standing before Him: We are united with Christ! We will need patience until we fully see and experience this, namely on the Last Day.
- This new reality is a gift to us in our hearing: God says so. Your sins are forgiven! Therefore, it must be true. You are His beloved child, not the only one, but you are His child. That makes you confident, even in this world, that gives you hope and purpose, even in this life, even in struggles and revolutions and what have you. There is something that is indeed progressing in this world: God's Mission on earth! And you are part of it- God made you part of it!
- And therefore we participate in God's Mission on "grass-root level", in humbleness and joy, serving our neighbour, whoever it may be, with the best gifts from heaven, namely with God's Law and especially with His Word of Atonement in Love. **Amen.**
- *The Lord keep you always in this true Faith, in Jesus' name. Amen.*