

The Eleventh Sunday after Trinity – Pr. Faugstad sermon  
St. Luke 18:9-14: “We Are Justified by the Works of Jesus.”  
August 19/20, 2023 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

**In Nomine Iesu**

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All that I was, my sin, my guilt, / My death, was all mine own;  
All that I am I owe to Thee, / My gracious God, alone.

The evil of my former state, / Was mine, and only mine;  
The good in which I now rejoice / Is Thine, and only Thine. Amen.  
(H. Bonar, *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, 451, vv. 1-2)

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)*

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*The sermon text for today is taken from the eighteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:*

[Jesus] also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘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.’ / “But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ 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.” (ESV)

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*These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)*

In Christ Jesus, who rewards us not because of what we have done, but because of what He has done, dear fellow redeemed:

The opening words of today's reading state: “[Jesus] also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt.” Is this parable really for you? Is it for me? Are we people who trust in our own righteousness? Do we treat others with contempt? We find the Pharisee and his praying to be offensive. We admire the humility of the tax collector. So do we really need to hear this parable today?

Let me change the characters a little, make it more personal, and see if it gives us a different angle to consider it. “Two people went up into the temple to pray, one of them was you and the other Jesus.” In that comparison, we know which one is the prideful and arrogant one, and which one is humble. We might not step out and boldly say the things the Pharisee did, but Jesus wants us to examine the pride we have in our hearts and minds.

We can hardly imagine saying the things publicly that the Pharisee said. But we certainly have thought them. We have looked around us at the extortioners, unjust, adulterers, and cheats and

stood a little taller – “I’m glad I’m not like them!” On the other hand, we have counted up the good things we have done and thought we were in pretty good shape.

Our natural tendency according to our sinful flesh is to get the object of our love wrong. The Commandments direct us to love the Lord our God with all our being and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Our love should be focused outward, not inward. And yet, what motivates us is often what pleases us, what makes us feel good, what benefits us. That’s the attitude that puts us in the place of the Pharisee.

The Pharisee said the words, “*God, I thank You,*” but it’s obvious he was really thanking himself. His “prayer” does not read like a humble offering but as a prideful recounting of all the reasons God should be pleased with him. What do our lists look like? “God, I thank You that I’m not lazy and dishonest like my co-workers are – that I’m not mean like my classmates – that I’m so good to my family – that I do so many wonderful things for others.”

It is not the good works that are the problem, but where we think the credit belongs for those good works. Why are you a hard worker? Why are you nice? Why are you good to your family? Why have you done so many wonderful things for others? If you think it is because you are such a good person and better than most, then you are most certainly the Pharisee. But if you humbly confess that the good you do is not really from you but is a gift of God, then you are the tax collector.

Now the tax collector was undoubtedly sinful. Tax collectors had the reputation of charging more taxes than required. We get a sense of this from Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector whom Jesus spotted up in a sycamore tree. When Jesus went to Zacchaeus’ home for a meal, all the people grumbled that He had “*gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner*” (Luk. 19:7). But Zacchaeus’ heart had changed. He stood up and vowed to Jesus, “*Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold*” (v. 8).

The tax collector in the temple was also troubled by his sins. He stood way off to the side. He didn’t want to draw any attention to himself. He kept his eyes downcast. It’s as though no one were there except him and God. He struck his chest and said, “*God, be merciful to me, a sinner!*” Notice what he did not do. He did not put on airs, as though he were too important to show any weakness. He did not point out the Pharisee’s pride or exchange words with him: “Oh yeah, well what about when you did this and this!” All he could see was his own sins and God’s faithfulness.

That is the model for humility and repentance that Jesus sets before us. But we never do this perfectly. I have mentioned before the lesson my classmates and I learned from a college professor, who asked if we thought we were more like the Pharisee or the tax collector in this parable. Of course, we identified with the tax collector. “If you think you are more like the tax collector,” he said, “you are probably the Pharisee.” Yes, we can be proud even of our humility.

Jesus says, “*For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.*” We are humbled not by our own doing, as though it were a good quality in us. We are humbled by the Holy Spirit working on us through the Law of God. We are humbled by being shown we are not as good as we want to think. We are humbled by having our self-focused love

exposed. We need the Holy Spirit to continue to do this humbling work, because the old Adam in us always thinks he knows best. But that fruit is still rotten to the taste.

The second Adam never tasted that fruit. He never sinned. He humbled Himself completely, perfectly. The apostle Paul writes that God's Son, Christ Jesus, *"made himself nothing, 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"* (Phi. 2:7-8). Jesus humbled Himself all the way. He did not maintain any dignity or honor for Himself. He never put Himself first. He put Himself right in our place and accepted all our sins as His own. He was no sinner, but He appealed to His heavenly Father to consider Him *the* sinner.

And the Father did. *"For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin"* (2Co. 5:21). Jesus was cast outside the city, ridiculed by self-righteous men, and forsaken by God. There would be no mercy. He had to be the object of the Father's wrath, so we sinners would not be. He had to make the payment, because we had nothing to offer. He had to atone for all sin with His holy blood.

His perfect humility, His perfect sacrifice, means that God no longer condemns us. Jesus did the work in our place that we could not do. He fulfilled God's holy Law of love for us, and He cancelled the whole debt of our sins that we could never pay. Because of these works of Jesus, we are justified before God, pronounced righteous, declared innocent of any wrongdoing.

Comparing the results of Adam's sin and Jesus' righteousness, Paul declares, *"Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous"* (Rom. 5:18-19). What Adam did, Jesus undid. What Adam ruined, Jesus restored. You are just as guilty as Adam because of your sin, and you are just as righteous as Jesus because He credits His righteousness to you.

There is no need to boast in your own works like a Pharisee. Far better works are yours by faith in Jesus. Everything He obtained by His humble work, He shares with you. He even shares His glory with you. That glory is hidden now while the world seems to be king and the members of Christ's Church seem so lowly and powerless. But that glory will be revealed when Jesus returns with a shout and the sound of a trumpet on the last day.

Then we who are justified by the grace of God will also be glorified. We who are humbled will be exalted. We walk in our Lord's footsteps. We live the life He has laid out for us. We take up our cross and follow after Him. It may not be a life that seems very impressive. We may be looked down on as those whom no one would desire to be. Accusing fingers identifying our faults will be pointed our way.

We don't have to play the world's game, a game in which everyone loses. It is not for us to sling mud with the self-righteous Pharisees. We carry out our humble callings, off to the side, eyes looking down with compassion on our neighbors in need, always with a prayer for God's mercy on our lips. He hears these prayers. He does have mercy on us. He sends us to our homes and to our work justified.

Knowing that we are right with God makes us joyful in our work and eager to serve. We don't need to prove our worth to God, to others, or even to ourselves. Our worth is firmly established in God's Son, who took on our flesh, suffered and died for us, so that we would have life and purpose and fulfillment in Him.

Let us pray: God, we thank You that though we are just like all others in our sin and have not lived the life of love You commanded, yet You have had mercy on us poor sinners. You have judged us righteous by faith in Your Son, who humbly gave Himself in our place and is now exalted above all things. To You alone be the glory.

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.*

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