

Honest Prayer

Living the Liturgical Year

Luke 18:9-14

EXPLORING THE SERMON

- * What did you hear?
- * What did you think or feel about what you heard?
- * What is one thing you can take away from the sermon this week?

KEY VERSES

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: ¹⁰ “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’ ¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other, for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

REFLECTION

Jesus’ audience as he tells this parable is the religious elite, who would naturally assume that the kingdom of God is a place where they – the upright – belong, not sinners. “God, I thank you that I am not like other people.” (v.11) **Is this a familiar prayer to you? How has the desire to be seen as right been a driving force in your life?**

As with most stories in the Bible, our tendency is to jump to the obvious application for our lives and choose which character we’re supposed to be like. Replace the Pharisee with someone whose faith you admire. With that in mind, the Pharisee seems the likely choice – he fasts, gives 10% of his income, etc. – in contrast with the tax collector, who is in collaboration with the Roman occupation in oppressing his fellow Jews. **How are their prayers different? Which one presents a list of virtues, and which one actually asks God for something? How does your prayer life relate to theirs?**

Only the tax collector went home justified. As opposed to the Pharisee, he doesn’t compare himself to anyone there, and is aware of his reality. The Message interprets v.14 this way: “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.” When we admit to God that we are in need, we instantly receive the gift of his mercy – justification – with no take backs! C.S. Lewis wrote, “we come to God as rebels to lay down our arms, surrender, and throw ourselves at the mercy of God.” **What is your bid to change from this parable, aside from the obvious prescription of humility? How are you reminded that God’s mercies are new each day and bring fresh opportunities?**