

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth
Sunday, October 23rd, 2022
Rev. Gerry Gallant

Pride vs Humility
Proper 26
Luke 18:9-14

Welcome

Announcements

- Study Club for Students!!!! M&W 3-5.
- Halloween

Call to Worship

O Lord, our Lord,
there are many places we could go this morning,
but we have desired to come to your house.

There are many voices to which we can listen today,
but we desire to hear your voice.

It would be easy to scatter,
but we have chosen to gather.

We need to behold your beauty,
to inquire in your temple,

to be wrapped in your love,
and to experience your renewing Spirit.

Come close, Lord Jesus,
to fill us and renew us. Amen.

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

Ever present God,
we thank you for calling us to meet with you today.
We praise you for coming to us long before we first came to you,
for knowing who would be here today,
and for knowing even our motives for coming.
By your Spirit lead and guide us during this service,
to help us hear you when you speak

and to guide our responses with hearts and voices
that rejoice in your presence. Amen.

Opening Hymn #650: "He Leadeth Me"

He leadeth me: O blessed thought!
Oh words with heavenly comfort fraught!
Whate'er I do, where'er I be,
still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me.

Refrain:

He leadeth me, he leadeth me;
by his own hand he leadeth me:
a faithful follower I would be,
for 'tis God's hand that leadeth me.

Sometimes mid scenes of deepest gloom,
sometimes where Eden's flowers bloom,
by waters still, o'er troubled sea,
still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me. Refrain

Lord, I would clasp thy hand in mine,
nor ever murmur nor repine;
content, whatever lot I see,
since 'tis my God that leadeth me. Refrain

Call to Confession

Prayer of Confession

**Merciful God,
You created human beings with gifts of intelligence and imagination.
Yet we confess we often use these gifts to exploit your creation
and put others in their place.
So often we think that we are great when we are small.
Or we claim smallness when you set a challenge before us.
We convince ourselves that our sin is not nearly as great as others,
yet, every sin offends your purpose for us.
Forgive us, we pray,
and grant us a truer picture of ourselves.**

Assurance of Pardon

Friends in Christ, God is gracious.
Christ has promised that those who humble themselves will be exalted.
Having confessed our sin, let us trust the good news of the Gospel.

In Jesus Christ we are forgiven. Thanks be to God.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.

For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory,

Forever and ever. Amen.

Music Ministry: "The Untroubled Heart" by Choir

Responsive Reading

Question 86. Is Jesus Christ the only way to salvation?

Yes. Jesus Christ, is the Way, the Truth, and the Life through whom we come to God.

When we witness to others we point not to a religion or an institution but to a person, Jesus Christ. Decisively and uniquely, God has spoken his word in him and we are compelled to share this good news.

Jn 14:6, Acts 4:11-12, Rom 1:16

Question 87. Should we proclaim the gospel to people of other religions?

Yes. The good news of God's love in Jesus Christ is for all people, including those who practice other religions. Yet we also hold that God's Spirit is at work in people of all religions producing truth and inspiring goodness. When we approach them with the gospel, we address them not in a spirit of arrogance but in humility, "like beggars telling others where food is to be found."

Titus 2:11, 1 Tim 2:3, Rom 15:7, Rom 11:32, 13:10; Ps 103:8; Jn 3:19; Lk 6:37; Mt 5:44.

Question 88. What then is the eternal destiny of those who have not believed in Christ?

It is not for us to say how God will deal with people of other beliefs or of no belief. Three things are clear: first, God loves universally; secondly, the God who loves in freedom grants us the freedom to respond to the offer of salvation; thirdly, the destiny of all people is in the hands of God, whose love, mercy and justice we trust.

Ps 103:8, Rom 9:32, Jn 3:16, Deut 30:15-20; Ezek 18:32, 33:11; Jn 3:17-20.

Children's Hymn # 570: "I Have Decided To Follow Jesus"

I have decided to follow Jesus;

I have decided to follow Jesus;

I have decided to follow Jesus;

No turning back, no turning back.

Though none go with me, I still will follow,

Though none go with me I still will follow,

Though none go with me, I still will follow;
No turning back, no turning back.

Will you decide now to follow Jesus?
Will you decide now to follow Jesus?
Will you decide now to follow Jesus?
No turning back, no turning back.

Children's Lesson

Prayer for illumination **(Congregant Prepared)**

Scripture

Luke 18:9-14

The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

⁹He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ¹⁰“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The 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. ¹²I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ ¹³But 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!’ ¹⁴I 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.”

Sermon

Last week, we spoke about how we should be handling everything in life with prayer. How we are to come to God in prayer when times are good, and when times are difficult. However, we should know that it is possible to be doing the right thing, handling everything in prayer, and to be doing it in the wrong way.

What makes prayer challenging for many people is the struggle of knowing how to pray. Many people think that they need to pray in King James English, others believe that they need to have long prayers with lots of scriptural verses referenced in them, some wonder if they should pray silently, and others if they should pray out loud. There are those who say that you should kneel, or sit, or stand, or that your hands should be held together, or fingers interlaced. Then the whole question of if your eyes should be opened or closed comes up. Prayer is speaking with God, and no one wants to get it wrong, so the thought of prayer actually creates stress in many people lives, especially when they are asked to pray aloud or in front of others.

What Jesus is trying to teach us in the scripture today is that we really do not have to worry about getting the wording of our prayers absolutely correct, we do not need to worry about our eyes or hands or whether we are seated, standing or kneeling. God is more concerned about our hearts when we come to him in prayer than any of these other things.

I'm sure we've all read this piece of scripture before, I'm sure we've all heard sermons on this piece of scripture before. That is why it is so easy for us to want to jump all over this Pharisee and point out the flaws and how different we are from him in our prayer. In the Pharisee we see nothing but arrogance and pride, and that makes him easy for us to label, easy to categorize, and easy to criticize.

Yet we need to remember that this Pharisee was a good man, he was pious, righteous, and giving. He lived according to the scriptures as he had been taught, he was not ashamed of his faith, he evangelized, he was honest in his business dealings, gave freely of his blessings, help those in need. He was a decent, upright man who lived his life with integrity. He would be welcomed at almost any church in the world, both in his time and today.

His failing was in his pride and the self-righteousness that stemmed from it. People say that pride is the only sickness that everyone can recognize except the one who has it, and this pharisee is proof of that statement.

We've all probably seen people like this in the church, I'm sure that we have all known someone who is full of pride. These are the people who follow the rules of their religion perfectly, they make sure to dot every single 'i' and cross every 't'. They obey what the religion teaches to the letter, and if something is not clearly defined in the rules of the religion, they do what they wish. They often make a big deal out of this, showing how faithful they are compared to others who they consider less faithful. They like to point out where they have religion right and others have it wrong, often because they misinterpret the scripture to say what they want it to say, rather than letting it say to them what the heart of the message means.

We can see that behavior in the Pharisee, he chose to stand in the very center of the inner court, at the very heart of the temple. He stood there because that was where the Rabbi stood when he taught from the scriptures on the Sabbath, so the acoustics allowed the voice that came from that spot to echo to every corner of the temple. He stood there because it was not only where he could be heard the clearest but also where he could be seen the clearest. He desired to let everyone in the temple know not just how wonderful he was but how close to God he was. He wanted everyone to know that he had religion right, and they should all follow his example.

We learn from his prayers that he fasted twice a week. The Old Testament requirement was only that a Jew fast once a year on the day of atonement. Yet this man wanted to prove he was more, so he fasted two times a week essentially 103 times more a year than he was required to fast.

We also learn that he tithes of everything he possessed. The scriptures again only required you to tithe on your income. But this man tithes on everything he earned and everything he bought. He was proud that he could tithe so much.

Now there is nothing wrong with fasting more than once a week, and there is definitely nothing wrong with giving more tithe to the church. The problem was with how this Pharisee thought about what he was doing. Like many people in the modern world, he thought his goodness somehow gained him credit with God. He thought his extra tithing and his extra fasting somehow brought him closer to God. In a sense he believed it was his actions on earth that gave him the right to be somehow closer to God. He was very religious and very proud of it. He believed with his whole heart that he had religion right, yet the religion he believed in had was all in his head and nothing to do with his heart and God.

The truth is if you are trusting in anything, church membership, baptism, church attendance, religion, good works, anything other than Jesus Christ to make you right with God, if you believe that anything other than Jesus Christ is needed to have God accept you, you are fooling yourself! This Pharisee was fooled because he believed that God would be impressed with everything that he was doing!

This pharisee was simply self-focused. He believed it was everything he was, and everything he did, that had earned him his salvation and his relationship with God.

If you look at his prayer, you'll notice that he was focused upon himself. He had an 'I' problem. Five times in his prayer you will see he uses the pronoun 'I', 'I thank, I am not like, I fast, I tithe, I get'. He was addicted to himself, filled with pride, he had an inflated ego, he believed he was much more important than he was, and he had placed himself above where God should be in his life!

CS Lewis said, 'A proud man is always looking down on things and people, and of course, as long as you are looking down, you can't see something that's above you!'

The Pharisee had fooled himself, he believed he was better than other men, he thanked God that he was not an extortioner, an unjust man, an adulterer, or worse yet a tax collector. He was the one looking down on everyone around himself. He told God that he was thankful that he was not like other men, all these sinners, that he was so righteous and religious. But we should all know that he is like every man, as we are taught in the book of Romans, '**all have sinned and come short of the glory of God**' (Romans 3: 23)

The truth of the matter is whether we consider our sins a big sin or a little sin, it is still sin! Regardless of how human beings try to categorize their sin, justify their sin, or explain away their sin, to God it is all the same, it is sin! All humans are sinners, it is in our nature, regardless of how we were raised, the school we attend, the economic bracket we live in, the social groups we hang out with, or even the church we attend, we are all sinners!

The pharisee failed to recognize this, he approached God full of pride, full of himself, stood in the very center of the temple, and in a loud voice praised himself. When you approach God full of pride, the only one you end up talking to is yourself! When you approach his word thinking you know His truths and they align with your lifestyle, you will always find what you are looking for, because you will twist his scriptures to match your pride filled thoughts. Yet when you let his word teach you, when you wrestle with the heart of the scripture in your own heart, you will be filled with the knowledge of who you really are and how important God really is in your life.

I heard someone say once, 'the only person God sends away empty handed is the person who is already full of himself.' When we approach God full of pride, our prayer and praise is nothing but our own voice echoing in our own ears.

This is why it is so important that we do not act like the Pharisee, we do not see ourselves as better than anyone else, we do not see ourselves any less sinful than anyone else, we do not place other people's sins as being and less sinful or more sinful than our own! Instead, we all need to learn to come to God in humility and know that it is not our works that he is looking upon. God looks at who we are, God sees our hearts.

This is what we see contrasted in the scripture between the Pharisee and the tax collector. The tax collector would have been the exact opposite of everything the pharisee was in that culture.

Basically, tax collectors with the scum of Jewish society. They were the money collectors for the Roman government. They had the ability to decide what a sales tax should be on every sale, so they were known to but the tax and collect far beyond the required taxes of the Roman government, skimming money off the top to line their own pockets, to buy the things they wanted, and to live a life of luxury. In the modern world we would say that tax collectors were the type of men who were known to steal candy from babies, or a welfare check from their own mother. They were seen as traitors to the nation of Israel because they had sold their allegiance to the Roman government for their own gain.

In fact, they were so hated, that they couldn't even hold a public office or give testimony in a Jewish court, because their word was considered worthless, it had no honor if it could be bought! To the people of Israel, the tax collector was without a doubt a liar, a cheat, a traitor, and a swindler. In fact, have you noticed in the bible it almost always says that Jesus was with the tax collectors and sinners, not the alcoholics and sinners, not the sexually immoral and sinners. To the people of Israel at that time to be a tax collector was viewed as the worst form of sinner.

And in this way, this parable took a twist to the listeners of the time, they would have expected the pharisee to be the one that God was listening to and not the tax collector. Yet it is the tax collector who will capture God's attention through his honesty and humility.

In every way that the pharisee was proud and full of his own sense of self-righteousness, the tax collector was honest about his human nature and humble before God.

The pharisee had stood in the center of the temple, where he was clearly seen by everyone, where the rays of the sun would be shining down upon him. The tax collector stood in the outermost circle of the temple, the court of the gentiles, where he would have stood in the shadows.

The pharisee was too busy raising himself up and looking down upon others to look up to God. But the tax collector was too ashamed by his own behavior, to even raise his eyes up towards heaven.

The tax collector beat his breast with his hand, a sign of mourning, something that was almost never done in public by men. Unashamedly beating his chest showing God that he had a filthy, sinners' heart.

The Pharisee had prayed all about his self-righteousness, while the tax collector kept his prayer simple, 'God, be merciful to me, a Sinner!'

Jesus tells us it is the tax collector's prayer that God heard. Jesus said, 'I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted'(v14)

The truth is that for many people who were in the temple that day, to the majority of people who were looking at these two men, it is the pharisee who they would have thought was the closest to God. To all those who are listening as Jesus told this parable, it would be a shock that the Pharisee was not the one who was exalted. After all, it was the Pharisees who were the leaders of the religion, the ones that all of society believed were the closest to God. They were the ones who told everyone how much closer to God they were, how much better their understanding of the scriptures was, how much different they were than sinners, and how much more deserving they were of God's salvation. But truthfully, the Pharisees were excellent practitioners of the religion of man and not true followers of the word of God.

Instead, it was the tax collector, the one who was willing to humble himself, the one who was willing to set aside his pride, his sense of self, the one who was willing to recognize his sinful nature and his inability to overcome it who was closer to God.

You see this parable reminds us of something, every single person in the world is a sinner. It doesn't matter what religion you follow or what society you live in, whether you are rich or poor, popular, or outcast, or any other way you categorize people, it is a fact of human life that we are all sinners. Both the tax collector and the pharisee were sinners, yet they approached it very differently. The tax collector truthfully admitted who he was to God, he admitted his sinful nature, while the Pharisee either because of the refusal to see his sin, or the desire to hide his sin, stood in front of God and lied about his true nature.

God knows our hearts! Yet so many times human beings try to hide their heart from God. It's like the little white lies we tell in our life; you know all the lies that we tell.

When we know we're running late, and we say we're almost there!

When we don't answer an e-mail, and we say it must be in our spam folder!

All the excuses we make, so that we don't have to do something we do not really feel like doing with somebody!

I could list white lies all day long, and still be able to go on for days. We often tell them because we don't want to hurt other people's feelings, because we just don't want to do something, or sometimes because we don't want to recognize something in ourselves.

But as you know, you can lie to others, but you cannot really lie to yourself! You may be able to convince others, you may even be able to trick yourself at times, but you cannot lie to God! God knows who you are, he knows what you're about, he knows your every thought, every word, and every action! So why do we try to lie to God?

God deserves our honesty and our humility. This is why we are to come to him so often in prayer, to turn to him in all things, because he already knows who we are and the situation we are in, and he loves us as a father loves his children.

Jesus's conclusion of this parable would have shocked everyone who heard this parable. The same way it would shock many people today, to find out that those Christians who they think are the closest to God, are actually filled with pride much in the same way as the pharisee, and in fact are going to be humbled before God when they come to judgement.

You see it does not matter to God, how the people on this world view Christians. It does not matter if your religion tells you that you are saved, it does not matter if the world tells you that their opinion of what the Bible says makes it OK for you to live in your sin. It does not matter if the people of the world believe that you are a good person. It does not matter if the world says that you are a moral person or a loving person. The Pharisee would have been the one that everyone believed was going to heaven, he was the one who all of society believed was the good, loving, and moral human being. Yet when judgement comes, it is not society's opinion that counts, it is only God's knowledge of who you are and how you have lived according to His scriptures and His will!

It is not how the popular culture sees us, how society in general sees us, how the religion sees us, or even how we see ourselves that matters. The only thing that matters in this world is how God sees us.

When we see God the way that he is portrayed in the scriptures, when we know who God really is in our lives, when we see him as our king, our priest, and our profit, he begins to change the way we see ourselves and we recognize the truth of who we really are, sinners!

And that knowledge opens us to an understanding of the mercy that God has given us. There is nothing that we could do, no goodness that we can perform, no act or work that we can accomplish that will earn God's forgiveness and mercy. It is only because we came to him humbly recognizing that we can do nothing without him recognizing that we are trapped in our sins, recognizing who we really are and admitting that we need him that he grants us his forgiveness, his mercy, and his love!

So, if you are here today and you feel a little bit out of place because you are not the perfect Christian that is portrayed in the popular world, if you have done something wrong, if you have struggled with sin. Congratulations, you are like the tax collector, you are eligible for salvation. The people who find it most difficult to recognize their need for God in their lives are the people who think they are already saved because of their own self-righteousness. The people who find their salvation are the ones who realize that they are born sinners, bent toward the will of the world, and only have God's love, grace, and mercy to call upon to save them from the life they are living.

Let us pray,

Work in Us True Obedience

Almighty, eternal, and righteous God,
 we humbly thank you
 for revealing your divine will to us
 in your law
 about what we should do
 and what we should avoid.
 We also humbly pray, for Christ's sake,
 that you would work in us true obedience,
 graciously forgive us all our sins of negligence,
 and strengthen and lead us
 by your Holy Spirit
 that we begin to serve you
 in new obedience here,
 until we come to complete holiness
 before you in that life to come;
 through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord.
 Amen.

Source: Attributed to Martin Luther, found in Allgemeines evangelisches Gesang- und Gebetbuch zum Kirchen und Hausgebrauch, Hamburg, 1846, p. 436#1.

Music Ministry: "Great is Thy Faithfulness" by Trish Warren

Invitation to Offering

Offering

Presenting our tithes and offerings is an act of worship. I want to encourage you to write a cheque and drop it in the mail to the church using your envelope, if you have one. (St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, PO Box 161, 1 Drummond St W, Perth, ON K7H 3E3). We also have another option for you for giving and that is you can make an e-Transfer. This note from our treasurer:

E-transfers are now accepted. Please note the new email address for this purpose only. standrewspert offering@gmail.com If you have an Offering Envelope #, please include it in the message section of the INTERAC transfer page you fill in. If you wish any part of your donation to go to a specific fund (e.g., Presbyterian Sharing) please mention this in your message.

Offertory Prayer

(Congregant Prepared)

Closing Hymn: "Yet Not I But Through Christ In Me"

What gift of grace is Jesus my redeemer
There is no more for heaven now to give
He is my joy, my righteousness, and freedom
My steadfast love, my deep and boundless peace

To this I hold, my hope is only Jesus
For my life is wholly bound to His
Oh how strange and divine, I can sing, "All is mine"
Yet not I, but through Christ in me

No fate I dread, I know I am forgiven
The future sure, the price it has been paid
For Jesus bled and suffered for my pardon
And He was raised to overthrow the grave

To this I hold, my sin has been defeated
Jesus now and ever is my plea
Oh the chains are released, I can sing, "I am free"
Yet not I, but through Christ in me

With every breath I long to follow Jesus
For He has said that He will bring me home

And day by day I know He will renew me
 Until I stand with joy before the throne

To this I hold, my hope is only Jesus
 All the glory evermore to Him
 When the race is complete, still my lips shall repeat
 Yet not I, but through Christ in me

When the race is complete, still my lips shall repeat
 Yet not I, but through Christ in me
 Yet not I, but through Christ in me
 Yet not I, but through Christ in me

Pastoral Prayer

Almighty God,
 be gracious to us and bless us
 and make your face to shine upon us,
 that your way may be known upon earth,
 your saving power among all nations.
 Empower all the peoples to praise you, O God,
 that the nations may be glad and sing for joy.
 For you judge the peoples with equity
 and guide the nations upon earth.
 Enable all the peoples to praise you, O God,
 for the earth has yielded its increase
 and you, our God, have blessed us.
 We ask that you will continue to bless us
 so that all the ends of the earth will revere you. Amen

Benediction

May you, people of God, know that
 God our Father made you and guides your every step;
 Jesus Christ gave his life for you and brings you new life;
 the Spirit keeps you in the Lord's presence and empowers you to serve.
 May almighty God continue to bless you and move you to give thanks. Amen.