

LAST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

23 Oct 16 @ St. Mike's

Luke 18.9-14

Fr. Christopher Durrant

In the name of God
Father, Son & Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Do you consider yourself righteous?

Do you regard others with contempt? Yes? No?

Well, if your answer is 'No', you can stop listening. If you're not regarding your neighbour with contempt because of your own sense of righteousness, then switch off now, and try to take a short nap in the pews.

This Gospel is not proclaimed for you!

If you already know the depth of your wounds and hurts; if you already share your intimate vulnerable reality with God; if you already feel His closeness vindicating you and liberating you with wholly undeserved and awesome love, then, you don't need to listen further. You've got it. You're there. Indeed, you should come up here and tell us all about it!

Anyone?

What you have then is me, Curate Chris, Fr. Christopher. Someone who admits to feeling righteous when everything seems to be going my way; someone who has been known to regard others with contempt because of a perceived slight or impatience or ignorance. I am someone who can identify with the Pharisee.

In our Gospel reading this morning, the Pharisee is not wrong to think of himself as righteous: he is a righteous descendant of Abraham. He should and does thank God he is not like those other people whose sin is more obvious, more preventable, more easily labelled.

Furthermore, the Pharisee fasts *more* than the Jewish Law requires, just like the devoted followers of John the Baptist. And the Pharisee gives as charity more of his money than is required by the Law - what parish treasurer would not want to encourage that good behaviour? And as the Pharisee stood by himself saying his private prayers as prescribed by the Law, there is no reason to doubt that his prayers were heard by God.

In our Gospel reading this morning, the Pharisee is not wrong.

But he is more wrong than the Tax Collector.

A better translation of the original Greek text here suggests, I am advised, is that the Tax Collector was not justified *rather* than the Pharisee, but that the Tax Collector was *more* justified. Just as the Tax Collector did, so the Pharisee returned home, justified.

So then, I hear you grumbling in your hearts, what's the difference? Why tell us this story? If this Gospel is not about justification, what is it about?

Well, it's about relationship – a predictable enough response really. God is all and always about relationship - his relationship with us, and ours with Him.

The Tax Collector approached God with humility, which invited God into his life in such a way as God was desirous to enter and dwell.

The Pharisee approached God with an attitude of exalted importance, exalted promises, exalting himself above others. This excluded God by opposing His divine reality of other-regarding love.

And this is why I say I am someone who can identify with the Pharisee. I am ordained priest after all, chosen and affirmed to be with the people for God and with God for the people. But first and always I am a baptised sinner. First and always I am one who needs to be reminded to approach God from a position of humility.

If you look to your neighbour now, and find them taking a short nap in the pew, maybe this Gospel wasn't proclaimed for them. But if you're awake, then keep awake, this Gospel is proclaimed for you!

Humble yourself before God, be real with Him, receive Him in the Holy Sacrament of the Altar, and be in relationship.

Amen.

Luke 18:9-14 (NRSV)

The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

⁹ 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 look up 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 (*or perhaps* more) than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”