



Table Talk

By Rev. Timothy J. Swenson • ILT Dean of Chapel

The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

October 23, 2022

LUKE 18:9-17

.....
"God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" Vs. 13



As has often been the case while we have read through the gospel according to St. Luke, this parable treats self-justification. The parable juxtaposes two men, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee is the first to pray, standing by himself in the presence of God. As he prays, he delivers a list of his religious accomplishments. In that recital of his good works, you can hear that he is very familiar with them. Almost... almost he sounds like this list is something he recites with frequency... telling himself how good he is, how exalted he is before God, and how much better he is than other men. Thank God for that?

The tax collector, however, stands far off, careful not to sully the presence of God with his sinful person... careful to keep his eyes averted in shame over his sin (Ezekiel 13:5) ... careful to beat his breast in remorse over his sinfulness. The tax collector resorts to the only means left to sinners: to throw oneself on a merciful God. The tax collector is saying of himself, "I am the sinner. If there ever was a sinner, I am that one" (cf. Lk. 18:13). In this Jesus provides an anticipation of the Apostle Paul who declares of himself, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost" (1 Tim. 1:15). Most likely you have sung a hymn and claimed for yourself the title, Chief of Sinners. The tax collector has

no trust in himself... no trust in his own faith... no trust worthy of being rewarded with mercy from his God. What he does have is his hearing of the Word. Time and time again, the Old Testament, read aloud in the synagogue, announces the name of God as "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Ex. 34:6). The tax collector trusts this Word... he has faith in this Word... his trust and his faith exist entirely outside of himself. He knows, for the Word of God has told him so, that he cannot trust his heart. So, he places all his trust... all his faith... in the Word of God which has been preached to him, entered his ears, and (by the work of the Holy Spirit) brought him to faith. This man... this tax collector went down to his house justified by God, not because he was worthy but because he was nothing in the sight of the Lord and he knew it.

Table Talk: Discuss how humility itself can become an act of self-justification.

Pray: Keep me humble, Father. Hold both my sin and your mercy ever before me. Amen



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9 He 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. 11 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. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ 13 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!’ 14 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.”

15 Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. 16 But Jesus called them to him, saying, “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. 17 Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”



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