

October 23 2016

Scripture Lesson

Psalm 84:1-12

2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18

Luke 18:9-14

Sermon *Be Humble*

Thinking about the passage from Luke 18 that Joyce read today, the images that came to mind about the Pharisee and the tax collector were of a peacock and a vulture. What do you think of when you picture a peacock? Here is a beautiful bird that knows he is beautiful and he is usually strutting his stuff, fanning those beautiful tail feathers of his. Does it sound a bit like the Pharisee? The Pharisee, who by rights in his time, was somewhat better than most folk because of his standing and deep religious convictions, and he knew it.

Then there is the vulture. He is not beautiful and he dines on other animal's misfortunes. He does however have a purpose in life because he does clean up other animals that have died. Could the tax collector be likened to a vulture? He is not the most favorite bird around but he does have a purpose in life.

The parable goes on to describe how the two different men prayed at the temple. The Pharisee starts by thanking God that he is not like other people, thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even the tax collector that he can see. He goes on to tell how he fasted twice a week, and tithes a tenth of all his income. Is he praying or is he just bragging about himself? The tax collector on the other hand, doesn't even look to heaven, he beats his chest, and simply says "God be merciful to me, a sinner".

He makes no amends for who he is, does not boast, but simply asks for God's mercy.

The parable finishes by Jesus saying "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."

The Pharisee wasn't necessarily a bad person; he just liked talking about himself rather than actually pray to God. It reminds me of the parable of the rich fool from a few weeks ago. Having wealth isn't necessarily a bad thing; it is how you handle the wealth that you have been blessed with. It is the same for the Pharisee, it is not about who he is but is about how he handles who he is.

The tax collector on the other hand, knows exactly who he is and there is nothing that he wants to brag about.

So, how do we understand this parable and apply it to our lives today? We are all different and unique, we could be like the peacock or we could be like the

vulture. We all have a purpose in life. The world wouldn't work if we were all the same. The thing we need to remember is how we handle who we are. We need to live life with humility and grace. We need to be mindful of God's mercy. We need to remember that we are to love God first and then our neighbor as our self.

Then we won't be inclined to be like the Pharisee as he prayed and would be inclined to be more like the tax collector as he prayed.

We need to come before God in humble openness and fervent trust in God's goodness; we need to make room for God to work in our lives.

Charles Cousar writes, "Prayer is the occasion for honesty about oneself and generosity about others." Honesty flows from openness; an open heart, an open mind, a life opened to God and to transformation. Prayer is not a last resort when all the plans and programs and power plays have failed; prayer is the first and primary task of Christians. Prayer helps us to discover who we are and who God is: merciful and loving and just.

To close please listen to these quotes about humility:

Madeleine L'Engle, 20th century: "Humility is throwing oneself away in complete concentration on something or someone else."

Richard Rohr, 20th century: "It's not addition that makes one holy but subtraction: stripping the illusions, letting go of pretense, exposing the false self, breaking open the heart and the understanding, not taking my private self too seriously."

C.S. Lewis, 20th century: "A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you're looking down, you can't see something that's above you."

Soren Keirkegaard, 19th century: "The proud person always wants to do the right thing, the great thing. But because he wants to do it in his own strength, he is fighting not with man, but with God."

And my favorite: Mother Teresa, 20th century: "If you judge people, you have no time to love them."

Are you the peacock, or the vulture, or somewhere in between? No matter who you are, remember you have a purpose in life. You need to treat who you are with grace and humility. Amen.