

Scripture

Luke 18:9-14

Grounded

Once I got over hearing the Godspell scene from this scripture I really began to read it. I got to be the Pharisee in this scene, its a great one.

“God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, I fast and pray twice a week - get that? twice a week - can I get an Amen?” Thank God I am nothing like that tax collector.

Oh that self-righteous Pharisee. Can you imagine being that arrogant, that judgmental, that obnoxious? I'm sure glad I'm not like him. I am so much more humble and gracious and I pray way more than twice a week. I pray overtime I need a parking spot. I mean really. Who is this guy?

Wait a minute - what just happened there?

Friends, If this passage does not convict you- you likely didn't hear it. If we don't feel an ounce of guilt or conviction when hearing this parable I might suggest we are deluding ourselves. Lets be honest - we pray this prayer all too often. I like to think I catch myself and stop myself when I do - but not always, and I would be completely dishonest if I were to say I never felt my faith or theology had it more right than others. Oh I do my best not to prance about like this Pharisee but... internally from time to time.... I judge those supposed Christian Trump supporters along with many others.

I can even hear some folks saying with that comment- well that... that is justified, (and it might well be). But... Lets be honest and recognize when we start to judge, and belittle others for their faith, beliefs or lifestyles we are on a slippery slope towards being self-righteous bigots ourselves.

“It starts out as a benign statement,... A brief observation of comparison. A glance that sizes up the other. An aspect of an individual singled out as especially distasteful. All manifestations of our human brokenness toward comparison and condemnation.

But then, something changes. It is no longer a passing appraisal, but that which leads to judgment. Judgment without understanding. Judgment without empathy. Judgment without any attempt to see as Jesus sees. Without any action that tries to come near to the marginalized whom Jesus regards.”

Karoline Lewis writes “This story calls out this sin of ours -- the sin of dismissal. The sin of one-upmanship. The sin of appraisal and assessment before compassion. It calls attention to that time and space in between an all-too-quick evaluation and the final verdict of whether or not we deem another as one who meets the expectations we have set out.

This passage calls attention to those moments...in our lives when we too readily judge...instead of leading with love and generosity. When we size up the other with the assumption that our faith, our religiosity, our spirituality is somehow better.”¹

As good liberal United’s and Anglicans we likely are not questioning if the person gets a place in the kingdom but we are likely questioning if their faith is good and true and correct. Whenever we start to judge another we best go back to this passage. You might think that you are nothing like the Pharisee but lets stop and take another look at this person - who they really are - because if you are anything like me, as soon as you learned they were a Pharisee you started to judge them right away.

And yet - are we not more like the Pharisee than we care to admit? You see it’s not like this Pharisee is a bad guy. Maybe a bit arrogant but he’s a good person. He is righteous according to the law, he is living well and right. He is faithful. We might not like the way he is prancing about but Luke kind of sets him up for us to judge him. He is just being honest, he fasts and prays. We would all likely be better off if we fasted and prayed more often than we do. Maybe he can be an example of that for us.

The tax collector on the other hand - he is not like a revenue Canada agent of today. Although the way I’m feeling milked right now - maybe he is. (I digress)

Tax collectors of the day were the wealthy stealing from the poor. He had to get money for the empire any way he could, and he could collect it anyway he saw fit, and any extras were his own. He worked and lived in a system of oppression and he likely didn’t have an easy way out of it. Perhaps this is why he is begging for mercy, perhaps he doesn’t want to be in the position he is in, but now he’s stuck. He is at the temple after all, that is the place people go to meet God face to face. We don’t know this mans story, we don’t know how he got into the business he is in. Even those of us in good honest jobs land in systems that exploit the other. We all get caught in the system because we need the money or the resources or the job. We can judge the Pharisee and we can judge the tax collector but first we had better look at ourselves.

“Never look down on a struggle for life” Peter Short would say. Behind every set of eyes is a soul at work.

The Pharisee might be the target of judgement in this story because Jesus might be speaking to Pharisees. His target audience is announced as people “who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt.” We like to think we are not self-righteous but it is hard not to be these days. We live in a self-righteous culture. Self-righteousness is pandemic

¹ <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=4742>

these days. We all have our rights, we all deserve to be honoured and upheld, that is what we are taught. That is what we believe. Jesus is speaking to you and I.

Humility is hard to come by these days. We might act humbly from time to time but humility isn't something you achieve and move on, humility is something you have to work on every single day, humility is something to live in. The term "humility" comes from the Latin word *humilitas*, which can be translated as "humble", or "grounded", "from the earth"

When we live in humility we remember where we come from. From the earth. When we live in humility we remember we all come from God and when we remember where we come from and who we truly are we will be lead to turn our thoughts and our focus to God over self. The invitation here is to shift our focus off ourselves and turn our attention towards God who welcomes the outcast and the sinner, the least of these.

Last night we had an amazing evening at the multi faith homelessness forum. Our speaker Sherry Small reminded us that the first step towards ending homelessness begins with soul work. It begins with remembering our commonalities, remembering we are all human and we are all gifted. As soon as we begin to look at and focus on the inadequacy of others, we would do well to remember this passage. As soon as we begin to judge the other it is time to re-read this scripture.

“Our society excels in deciding on another’s fate. And that decision is usually based on that demonstrated by our Pharisaic friend in this passage. Our security in our own future all too often turns into certainty about the other. Our sense of justification gets caught up in our own self-righteousness rather than true trust in God’s love.

This story from Luke reveals how we too expediently worry about another’s justification... So, where is the good news, then? Well, perhaps the good news rests in us. That is, the good news will be heard, will be experienced, when we look beyond the obvious, the assumed, the expected in the other to a space and place of deep regard.”² If we began to live grounded, humble lives we will hold deep regard and love for all as we recognize we all come from God, we all come from the earth.

Seeing one another through the eyes of God as children of God is what the gospel calls us to. So the next time you catch yourself looking down on ‘the other’ take time to re-read this passage and turn your focus off yourself and onto the Holy so that you too may find yourself face to face with God and who knows you might even find yourself in the position of the tax collector - on your knees asking for Gods mercy so that you too might have your life transformed.

“Never look down on a struggle for life.”

Amen.

² <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=4742>

