

Trinity 11

Jesus spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.

The eighteenth chapter of Luke is a series of parables, one after the other.

First, Jesus tells of the widow who kept on seeking justice from an unrighteous judge who finally gave it to her just to shut her up.

By this Jesus underscored how persistent our own prayer should be.

That the Christian life is not a one-time event: "I asked Jesus into my heart..."

"I already asked for forgiveness." or "I asked Jesus to save me."

Contemporary Christianity is filled with this kind of talk that places Jesus and His help in the past tense and then moves forward without Him.

Not long ago, I had a conversation with a man where I was trying to stress the importance of preaching the forgiveness of sins week in and week out.

He agreed with me -- sort of. He said, "Yea. I suppose there could always still be some unsaved in the congregation who need to hear that."

The implication was: That once you are "saved" you don't need to hear it!

But Jesus says to be persistent. Keep on asking. Ask and ask and ask again.

That brings us to the prayer of the tax collector.

The Greek is clear. He stands continually beating his chest and repeatedly asking, "*God, be merciful to me, a sinner.*" This is the Kyrie.

Lord, have mercy upon us. Christ, have mercy upon us, Lord, have mercy...

Did you ever wonder why once isn't enough? We just confessed at the opening of the service, now we ask three times for mercy again.

The thrice more we sing, "*Thou that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us and receive our prayer.*"

Later, in the Agnus Dei we will ask this three more times.

Is this vain repetition? No! It teaches us to be like the tax collector.

And what of the Pharisee? He spends his time looking down on others and feeling confident that he no longer needs to ask for mercy.

After all, maybe he already asked for it some years before. Isn't once enough?

He already trusts in himself that he is righteous.

So he can only look down on those who are not yet saved.

This is exactly what Jesus describes in saying, "*some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.*"

Here are the two great sins: Against faith and against love.

Faith trusts not in yourself but in Christ alone. Faith does not find righteousness as something within yourself as some permanent gift.

Rather, faith always look for the righteousness which is Christ's alone and so seeks after Christ.

Our confidence (faith) is not in some righteousness abstracted from Christ and now our own possession. Rather our hope is that Christ Himself will dwell in us bringing His righteousness with Him.

When we turn faith around and, instead, trust in ourselves that we our righteous, the love is lost and replaced with contempt for others.

The pharisee offended God by trusting in himself that he was righteous.

The he offended his neighbor by looking down on--despising--him.

He thought of himself as better, smarter, stronger, holier and more important.

And it shows.

It shows in the way that you think of yourself first / consider your problems more pressing / consider your needs more important.

Consider your neighbor's sins more serious / consider his goodness less sincere.

Examine yourself and you will discern that Jesus tells this parable to you.

Who despise others and trust in yourself that you are righteous.

But that's not all you are. Not just a pharisee, you are also repentant for it.

That's why you are here! That's why you are singing the Kyrie.

We see in the tax collector the exact opposite of the Pharisee.

Where the pharisee sees righteousness in himself, the tax collector see only sin.

Literally: "God, be merciful to me THE sinner." As if he is the only one!

Far from seeing himself as superior to everybody else, the repentant considers himself worse and weaker, more unrighteous and insignificant than others.

That is the posture of love. To place everybody else before you.

And this life is not only a life of repentance, but also a life of faith.

Even though he considers himself as worse than all others, nevertheless, this does not cause him to stay home and away from God's just wrath.

Instead, in bold confidence and faith you come to the temple.

March right into God's presence--Sins and all--praying for and expecting mercy.

When Adam and Eve discovered their sin, they hid from God in the bushes.

This was not faith but unbelief! And it leads to a lack of love.

Many are those who stay away from Church--not because they don't care about their sins but because they are afraid to bring them into God's presence.

Don't do that. But rather trust that He is merciful and there is no better place for a sinner to be than in God's merciful presence.

For those who, in faith, see themselves to be the chief of sinners...

...Come here to learn that Jesus has become this in your place.

When He is nailed to the cross it is because He has taken all sin--your sin--upon Himself and therefore, Jesus Himself has become THE only sinner.

All punishment is borne by Christ so that all righteousness might be yours.

That is how you can confidently come into God's presence with your sin.

Not denying it but laying it on Christ. Not as strong but as weak.

After today's parable, Jesus says, "*whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.*"

Now you know what that means.

For with a trusting confidence a child receives all that he needs--day in and day out--from his loving father and mother who give only good. **This is faith.**

And by the simple fact of his stature, strength and intellect, a child constantly looks up to everyone around him. So also does the Christian. **This is love.**

Faith is to expect mercy and not reward. And love is to consider your neighbor as more deserving of good than you.

This is the Christian mind because this is Christ's mind toward you. AMEN.