

Message for Sunday, October 26, 2025

Scripture Luke: 18:9-14

Title: The Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand

Welcome

Announcements: Giving Options; The special offering for November will be the Emergency Assistance Fund, this is the last week for World Communion Sunday; Memorial Service for Fran Whetten is at 2PM in Sanctuary; Interfaith Classes start today at 2PM in Mingus Room; Volunteer for the Thanksgiving Potluck-signups in the foyer; Pastor Appreciation Month is the month of October; If you have a name for All Saints Day please call or email the church office BEFORE Wednesday.

Fellowship of Love

Song

Call to Worship

L: Rejoice in the Lord and be glad.

P: God is our hope and our salvation.

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L: The Lord blesses the earth with rain.

P: God crowns the year with bounty.

L: The Lord makes old men dream dreams.

P: God makes young girls see visions.

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L: Rejoice in the Lord and be glad.

P: God is our hope and our salvation.

Unison Prayer

Giver of dreams and visions, pour out your Spirit on our fellowship, for we need your presence in our lives.

Show your portents in the heavens and set your signs on the earth and seas.

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Touch our spirits with the awe of your majesty, that we may humbly dwell within your courts in peace and harmony. Amen.

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L: As we come to this time of offering, let us remember that giving is an opportunity to respond to God's generosity with our own.

Song

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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 lift up his eyes 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 than the other, for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

L: The word of God for the people of God.

P: Thanks be to God.

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There is a problem in certain facets of American Christianity. That problem is that we have already decided what we know about God and how we are supposed to act. Now I know saying that sounds weird. “Of course, we know how to act, it’s how our parents taught us.” Or “Of course we know how we should act in church, we’ve been raised there.” You see when I look around at American Christianity I get the impression from a significant number of people that we can live any way we want, do anything we want, (at least through the week) as long as we are repentant enough about it. Or I see it a different way, as long as we say the right thing and do the right thing than no matter what we are in right standing with God.

Both of these views of Christian living are rampant in the church today. The second one I listed is the example of the Pharisee in our text today. This example is often me and you. What I mean by this is that this parable is told to the religious people to grab their attention and point out the absurdity and how wrong some of our thought processes can

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be. Like the Pharisee most of us believe we are doing the right thing, and because of doing the right thing we guarantee our place with God and our place in the church. I know some of you are probably thinking “no I don’t think that.” But here’s the beauty, it doesn’t matter if that’s what you think if that’s how you *act*.

Like the Pharisee most of us try to go to church regularly. We try and worship regularly and do the right thing. We give our offering, even going so far as to remind God that we gave our tithe. Then we look around us and see other people going to church and we think, “thank God I’m not them!” Or more often than not we think something slightly different but still in line with this concept. We think we have this God thing figured out. We rest safely knowing that we will go to heaven, I mean God has to let me in because I am a good person and have done all the right things!

The opposite side of this is the tax collector. He is truly repentant for the wrongs that he has done, and in our story it reminds us that repentance, a true change of heart is the quality that matters the most. I read several commentaries, some good presbyterian ones, that wanted me to talk about the nature of man’s depravity, you see the idea is that the tax collector is very aware of his low status caused by the sin in his life. Because of that it leads to repentance and justification, in fact the story is clear, as the two leave the temple only one is justified.

However, there is a problem with this passage and this story. You see when Jesus was telling this story he was telling it to good religious people who were trying to do the right thing-but missing the mark. Unfortunately, that runs into a problem in a religious group that has been long since left behind- the actual origins of the story. You see most of us have learned from an early age that God wants us to be repentant and to accept Christ. The only way to do that is to confess your sins and truly repent, just like this tax collector! If you do that than you can rest assure that God is at work in your life, and you can feel Gods divine assurance. You see Jesus wasn’t addressing a church culture that has developed to say essentially “if you apologize and really mean it than you can do whatever you want every other time.”

Now I can hear the protests. “No one believes that!” If that is the case than why do so many act like that? Why do so many people vote and chose to live their faith in a public way that is contrary to the basic tenets of the Gospel? Why is it well known that some of

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the rudest and most cruel people to serve at a restaurant are there on Sundays after church? Why do some people seem like the moment they leave the church doors that they would as soon as run you over in the parking lot than talk to you? You see in the Gospel of Matthew it is pretty clearly what we are supposed to do. Chapter 25 says at the end of time God will divide us into sheep and goats. The difference between the sheep and the goats is what they did and not how they repented or if they earned their place in heaven. It is that they clothed the naked, fed the hungry, looked after the sick, and visited those in prison.

What I have found in American Christianity is that we have so commodified the gospel that it is a spiritual monetary exchange. If I do the right thing God will pay me. If I repent the right way God will forgive me. It all becomes performance driven, and it misses the point of the gospel; it misses the point of this story. IN this story you aren't the Pharisee, and you aren't the tax collector, you are both.

You seek to justify yourself before God by doing the right thing, and perhaps you hedge your bet by being sorry enough. The call that Jesus is giving here is to perhaps be both people. Perhaps if you do the good things for the right reasons that is an act of repentance enough? Perhaps if you repent because you genuinely believe that you did something wrong and are seeking to do better that that repentance is enough? Sun Tzu, the Asian philosopher stats that the dividing line between good and evil runs through the heart of every man. Perhaps the dividing line between being a good person and understanding that we make mistakes runs through the heart of each and every one of us?

I know this message may not be satisfying today. I know it would be far more satisfying to say, "be like the Pharisees, or repent like the tax collector." Both of these things are true; the reality is that it is you who will need to make that choice. It is you who will need to recognize if you make the mistake of thinking you can earn Gods forgiveness. It is you that need to recognize that you are just being performative and the repentance isn't truly in your heart. All I can do with you today is point towards Christ and encourage each of us to strive to be more like him. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer/ The Lord's Prayer

Song

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Benediction

Song