

Psalm 123

¹To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens!

²As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God, until he has mercy upon us.

³Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us, for we have had more than enough of contempt.

⁴Our soul has had more than its fill of the scorn of those who are at ease, of the contempt of the proud.

Luke 18:9-14

⁹He 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. ¹¹The 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. ¹²I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’ ¹³But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ ¹⁴I 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.”

A Humble Prayer

October 23, 2016

In a recent article in the Christian Century magazine pastors were asked to choose a book or a story that they think those in leadership in our country should read. There were many fascinating choices and I hope to add them to my reading list. And it got me wondering what would happen if our story about the two men who went into the temple to pray, were read as a preface to some of the political debates and media responses we’ve been listening too over the last several months? How would those who are presenting themselves as leaders, both politically or religiously, think differently about themselves, in light of a story, where those who are humbled are justified and those who exalt themselves are sent on their way. I wonder, don’t you?

We certainly live in a time where there are many self-righteous people who are willing to condemn those who they see as sinful or unclean, who believe the wrong things, or live the wrong way. The voices I hear most predominantly in the news come from those in the religious community who believe that they hold the corner on righteousness. I recently watched as Franklin Graham called those of us who consider ourselves to be more progressive in our understanding of scripture and God, atheists. I’m pretty sure he would call Adam Hamilton, the author of the book you are studying, a confused atheist. And it makes me think that Jesus would have a story to tell him about that. A story just like the one we hear today.

Two men went into the temple to pray. Two men. One who thought so highly of himself that he had no need for God and one who so desperately needed God’s grace that he couldn’t lift his face from the floor. And Jesus is telling this story to remind all of us, the righteous and the wretched alike, that we find fullness of life through God and not through our own efforts. Now there is nothing wrong with being righteous. There is every reason to live a life of holiness and with as much purity and integrity as you can. But to use that as a reason to condemn and exclude others will land you on the serious side of Jesus, a place you may not enjoy! And so Jesus tells a powerful story to remind those who think they can do it on their own, and who look down on others for not living up to their standards, that God’s love is bigger than that.

As I was preparing this sermon I came across a reference to a book that a friend gave me recently and as I read it again I was stunned by its relevance for today. And since Jesus is in a story telling mood, I thought it would be appropriate to share it today in its entirety. I am also trying to focus on children today particularly at Newdale so this will be sort of an extended children’s sermon.

Due to copyright laws I won't be able to include it in the written portion of my sermon but you may find it at any respectable book store. The book is called, **Sidney & Norman, a tale of two pigs**. Written by Phil Vischer and Illustrated by Justin Gerard. I want to thank Becky Ayala for giving it to me.

Conclusion:

You see, two men went into the temple to pray. Both were broken in their own way. One prideful the other broken hearted at what he had become. Both come before God to pray and struggle with the things of their hearts. And God, who looks on the heart reminds them and us that we are made perfect in His Love and not by our own efforts. So take heart today and remember that God loves you...he loves you.... he really, really, loves you. Now go and share that love with all the world. Amen.