

The Eleventh Sunday after Trinity Sunday
St. Luke 18:9-14
August 27th, 2017
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church
Greenville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

He Who Humbles Himself Will Be Exalted

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

There is a right way to worship and a wrong way to worship. There is a right way to approach God, and a wrong way. There is the worship of the Pharisee and the worship of the tax collector. God expects to be worshiped in a certain way, and our Lord + Jesus tells us today how He expects to be worshiped.

The Pharisee prays like the world prays. He prays to himself as if the only person listening is him. Notice that is what the text says, *“the Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself.”* He is praying to himself. He is not praying to God, but he is only speaking to appease his own ears, to puff himself up with his own works. And that is exactly the content of his prayer. *“God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.”* His prayer is all about himself. What he has done; how good of a person he is; how well he keeps the Ten Commandments (and least in his own eyes), and so on. He is so good in his own eyes, one wonders why he even needs the Lord God in the first place.

The sad thing is this Pharisee is much like a lot of people in many churches today. There are loads of people—misguided as they are—who actually think that being a Christian is all about how good of a person you are. They are consumed with doing good works to appease their fellowman. They, just like the Pharisee in the parable, would never steal, or treat people unjustly, or cheat on their wife, or even their taxes. And the world looks on them as if they are the shining example of morality. They may impress mankind, but they do not impress God. For their hearts are far from God, for they think salvation is found in their doing and working of the Commandments.

When they pray to God, God is not listening. For they have not learned how to approach Him. They have not learned the horror of their sins. They fail to realize just how desperate and horrible their situation truly is.

Sin is no laughing matter. Sin is something that is to be taken seriously. When we sin, especially when we intentionally sin, we are placing ourselves under God’s wrath and eternal condemnation. Death—eternal death at that—is not something to pass off as if it does not matter. We are in grave danger—pun intended. Our condition is one of weakness. We have no strength in ourselves to save us. Therefore, we should keep the Ten Commandments, but we should not do it in order to gain salvation.

Consider the baby who is newly baptized. We often view babies as “innocent;” as if they are little angels. And who can blame us, because after all they really are cute bundles of joy. But when we baptize a baby, in the baptismal rite we confess that before he is baptized this baby is sinful and condemned to eternal Hell and is outside of God’s grace. Why? Because that baby is born out of the seed of Adam. Adam bore Seth, a man in his own image. The baby waiting to be baptized is a sinner because of his parents, who are sinners in their own right, as were their parents and so on all the way back to Seth and our first parents Adam and Eve. And because of Adam and Eve’s sin, the world has inherited death. This is why sin is not something to be taken lightly, for we can talk about a person’s actions, and good deeds until the sun goes down, but in the end we are only, at best, neglecting original sin, that is, the sin from Adam, and at worst, we are flat out denying that original sin exists in us.

This is why the Pharisee’s worship is all wrong, because he thinks that sin is overcome by what he does, thinks, and feels. Praise the Lord + Jesus, that that is not the way by which we have salvation. Praise our Lord + Jesus that we are not justified by OUR works. You can do all the good works in the world, and be considered the greatest philanthropist in the world, but you will still not be justified because of your works. For if we fail in one small point, we are eternally doomed. Our faith must not be directed inward to what we do, but our faith must be directed outward, to what our Lord + Jesus Christ has done for us, and merited for us.

The tax collector in today’s Gospel reading realized this. And this is why he went away to his house justified, because he searched for his salvation, his forgiveness outside of himself, and in the one, true God alone. This tax collector is not being praised by the Lord + Jesus, just because he prays in the right way. This sinner is praised by the Lord + Jesus because of how he approaches God’s throne of grace—His mercy seat. He comes to God, on his knees, with eyes cast down. He prays the prayer of confession: *“Be merciful to me, a sinner.”* He is humble. He is contrite. He is sorry for his sins. He knows that he has no good thing living in him. He knows that he cannot be saved by anything he does. He knows that if he is going to have salvation, it is going to have to come from God. This tax collector comes empty-handed—as a beggar—begging God for mercy. Begging God for mercy, with nothing to offer in return; with no bargain that He can strike up with God.

Much like a baby who comes to the font to be baptized. The baby is not able to make any declarations about how many great works he has done. She is not able to express her emotions with deep feelings of piety. No, the baby who is baptized, comes before God empty-handed—kicking and screaming. In truth, you might say that the baby is dragged to the font against his will. And the Church pleads on his behalf to the Triune God to have mercy on him and forgive him, and make him His child.

Scripture teaches us that we are to approach God, as a little child. What does that mean? It means coming to God fully dependent upon Him to supply all our needs of body and soul. It means coming to God trusting Him fully to take care of all of our needs just like a little child comes to his parents trusting them that they will take care of him and feed him, not only with earthly food, but more importantly with the spiritual food of life—with God’s holy Word and His Sacraments.

The tax collector comes before God in such a manner. He trusts that God will fully forgive him, and give him salvation and eternal life. This is what makes his worship right in God’s eyes. This is how God desires to be worshiped. He desires that we approach Him; that we come into His Temple; that we hear His Word and receive His Sacraments with this humility and trust. The humility and trust that latches onto Christ’s works. This is after all what faith does. It clings to the works of Christ. It clings to His perfect fulfilling of the Law, and it clings to His sacrifice of Himself on the Cross for our forgiveness, life and salvation.

We poor, miserable, sinners cling to Christ as our one and only Savior, much in the same way that a tiny baby clings to his mother and father for help and protection. Our life, our salvation is found

only in Christ. It is not found in what we do, or how we feel. It is found solely in what Christ has done for us.

Let us go up into God's holy Temple and pray in this way, pray to Him on our hands and knees with our eyes cast down, and lay our sins before Him, saying "*be merciful to me, a sinner.*" Empty ourselves of our works—both good and bad. Look to the crucifixion of Christ for your salvation. This crucifixion reveals God's love and mercy for you. It reveals to each one of us that God has indeed not looked at our many transgressions, nor considers them against us, but He washes them all away with the Blood and water that flowed from His side. Our sins have been forgiven by God, by His Son's death. We are justified. We are made whole. We are exalted on account of our humility. Therefore, let us cling to our Lord's works in faith.

And on the days when you doubt whether your salvation is real or not. When you doubt whether or not God has actually saved you from your sins. When it seems that the world has surrounded you on all sides, and the accusers—the Pharisees with all their good works—are laughing at you right to your face. Remember that they are only servants of their master the devil, and they will have their reward. But you, you cannot be shaken by their accusations of being a poor, miserable sinner. For although this may be true—that you are indeed a horrible sinner—your sins have been washed away in the waters of Holy Baptism, and they are washed away every Lord's day, and every feast and festival day with His Body and Blood given in bread and wine.

When we come into the Lord's Temple to hear His holy Word, He preaches into our ears that we have forgiveness, and wherever there is forgiveness, there is also eternal life and salvation. Having come into the Temple to hear that message of salvation, hear it once more, "Your sins are forgiven." Now you may go home justified. Now you may indeed, depart in peace. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.