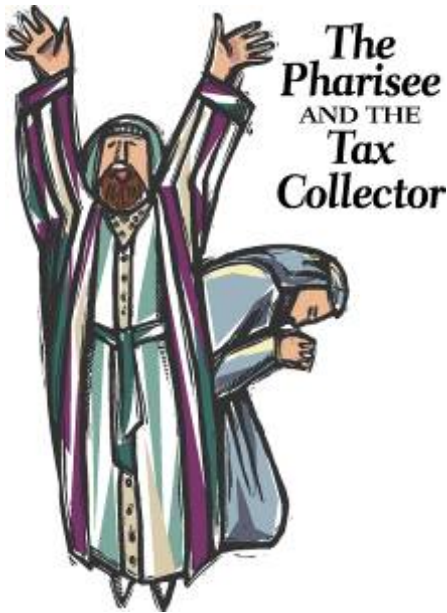


THE CROWN OF HUMILITY

Dr. Fred Fourie ~Sunday, January 7, 2007



Luke 18: 9 – 17 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 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. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' But 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!' 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." People were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it. But Jesus called for them and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not

stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly, I tell you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God, as a little child will never enter it."

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, a humble person, was walking along a narrow path when he met a man who disliked him. The man said to Wesley, "I never step aside for a fool!" Wesley replied, "I always do," and he stepped aside.

Who will ever forget how boastful and arrogant Muhammad Ali was during his boxing days? During those days he was about to take off on an airplane flight and the flight attendant reminded him to fasten his seat belt. He came back brashly, "Superman don't need no seat belt." The Stewardess retorted, "Superman don't need no airplane, either." Ali quietly fastened his belt.

Jesus tells a delightful story of two people arriving at Church for a prayer meeting. They were different in many ways. One was a Pharisee ~ well respected ~ very religious ~ setting a good example to everyone. The other was exactly the opposite - a despised tax collector for the Romans, so many considered him a traitor and thief.

One marched straight up to the altar ~ perfect for a photo opportunity ~ if they only had cameras those days ~ and spread his colorful robe ~ cleared his throat and prayed out loud, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector." The other man hardly made it through the back door. He sought a place where no one would notice him. Beating his breast ~ an old custom to show repentance and humility ~ his prayer sounded like this, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"

It is now centuries later, but nothing has changed. You can still observe these two in times of worship or wherever people gather. You will notice them in Cocoa Beach, Rockledge, Orlando and everywhere. Pride and Humility still live side by side in the same house, same school or the same Church.

This tax collector has something that the Pharisee badly needed. One can call it, "the gift of inadequacy." People who have this gift realize their incompleteness and need for forgiveness and God's grace. Jesus tells us that inadequacy is a necessary prelude to

grace. Without that sense of inadequacy the Pharisee's prayer was nothing but empty words. Filled with a sincere sense of unworthiness the poor sinner's plea for mercy echoed its way right to the heart of God!

The Pharisee was a good, outstanding citizen. He was the type of person that we would be proud to have as part of our community and our church. He enjoyed the work he did and was thanking God that he was able to perform his duties. However, there was something missing in his life. **Something was wrong and he just did not get it.** He thought he could win God's favor by his own accomplishments. Instead, he was alienating himself from God and from others with his proud attitude. He was so full of himself that there was no place or need for God left.

The Pharisee failed to realize that we draw closer to God and to others when we are able to admit our shortcomings and rely on God's grace. Friends, we are all sinners. The apostle Paul reminds us: **"All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God..."** in first John we find this verse, **"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."** **Understanding our inadequacy is a prelude to grace.**

The tax collector was aware of and ashamed of the life he lived. He could not even assume the proper prayer stance. He would not even look up to heaven. When he prayed, he called attention to his sins and not his accomplishments. He opened himself up to God, trusting in God and not himself. When he prayed, God heard his prayer. The tax collector was touched and changed because he was aware of his need before God.

There is truth in the saying, **"There is so much good in the worst of us, and so much bad in the best of us, that it ill behoves any of us to find fault with the rest of us."** Some people put on **their holier than thou expressions** and let people think that they have it all together. Many people write church people off as a bunch of super saints. Others prefer to avoid them because they feel so unworthy. Look around you; no one has a harp, a halo, or a set of wings. **The church is a wellness center where people come to get well and stay strong so that they can take on life and its many challenges, not a museum for saints.**

On this first Sunday of a New yet unknown year, some came to celebrate the table of the Lord because they possess that gift of inadequacy. They come to worship each Sunday -- not to trumpet their accomplishments, but to confess their needs. Their prayer comes from deep within, **"God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"**

Is that why you are here today? Come then, the table of grace, forgiveness and mercy is prepared for you! Amen