

St Thomas' and St Thomas' of the Air Church  
 August 15, 2021  
 Trinity XI  
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*For every one that exalteth himself shall be abased  
 And he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*

We resume the Trinity Summer Survey of Christian Doctrine today with an important message about how a Christian lives her or his life.

But it has been obscured a bit.

You rarely hear me or any of us departing from the wording of the 1928 Book of Common Prayer,

But this week I must point out an error.

It occurred in 1662 when the revisers changed the wording of today's Collect.

The Collect was originally from Gelasian Sacramentary of 8<sup>th</sup> Century France. Cranmer, translated it into English and affixed it to the XIth Sunday after Trinity when he wrote the 1549 Book of Common Prayer. When the Elizabethan Compromise took place, the revisers made a number of changes to Cranmer's work.

Among them was the rewording of this week's collect.

The change took place in the third phrase of the Collect:

Their wording is this:

“That we, running the way of thy commandments  
 May obtain of thy gracious promises,  
 And be made partakers of thy heavenly treasure;”

The original wording is this:

“that we running to thy promises,  
 may be made partakers of thy  
 heavenly treasure”.

Every good lawyer can tell you the great differences that a few word changes can make.

Here it is profound.

The revisers wording makes it sound as though salvation is the prize earned by the obedience to God's law.

The very mistake the parable is intended to dispel.

The original wording sustains the notion of the gift of Grace as pointing the way toward our salvation.

Ironically, the discussion of the necessary correction leads directly to the Christian Doctrine that Jesus would have us know:

St Luke's Gospel today gives us the parable that Jesus told of the "Pharisee and the Publican".

On the surface, the parable seems to be a story about humility.

And that is certainly part of the story.

But the meat of it, the heart of it

If you spend some time with it and

Inwardly digest it:

is about Grace.

(that gift of God that brings us closer to Him)

And it is about

God forgiving what He cannot excuse.

And it is about our salvation

depending not on what we can achieve

But upon

what we are willing to receive.

We are not saved by our own works

But by God's work.

It is a story that says;  
No matter how good we think we are  
It is not enough to get in to heaven  
And no matter how bad we think we are  
It is not enough to keep us out.

It is a story that says  
God does not judge us in comparison  
to another man or woman  
He judges all of us  
In comparison to Jesus.

Let's dig in to the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican  
and see if we cannot hear Jesus' message.

There are two people in the parable: the first is a Pharisee  
that sect of the Jews  
who exaggerated the letter of the laws  
and believed that strict and absolute compliance would  
literally buy favor with God.

We think of them as those who came to worship the law more than  
they worshiped God.

But they were the highest of Jewish society  
and were revered for their piety and wisdom.  
People bowed to them as they walked in the street.  
As if they were royalty

The second man is a publican.

He was also a Jew,  
but worked for the Romans  
to collect taxes from the Jews  
and paid them over to the Roman authorities.

It was common for publicans to collect more from the Jews than  
was owed to the Romans and pocket the difference.

If the tax was not or could not be paid,  
the Publican could confiscate property to cover it.  
Publicans could even take the wives and daughters of  
delinquent tax payers for their own nefarious purposes.  
They could also turn the tax payer over to the brutal Roman  
soldiers.  
Threats and extortion were the rule of the day.

As you might imagine,  
publicans were violently hated  
and ridiculed  
because they were seen as  
traitors,  
thieves and rapists.

So what is this loathsome sinner doing in the Temple?

An interesting choice for one of the men in the parable.

Jesus puts the two men in motion:  
The Pharisee is in the heart of the temple.  
We can imagine that there were a number of men praying in the  
temple  
(remember the women worshipped in a separate place).  
In the fashion of the time, he stood up to pray and. we could expect  
that he raised his hands  
and looked up to heaven as he spoke his prayer.

The publican would not come near the other men, but stood far off.  
Separated by class  
Status  
Or ridicule  
He would not lift his eyes up to heaven  
and with his hands he beat his chest.

Jesus gives voice to the two men and we begin to see more contrast;

We hear the Pharisee's prayer in which he:

Lists vices from which he abstains or perhaps which he attributes to the Publican:

Extortion

Unjustice

Adultery

Or sins committed by people like this publican here

Then he lists some pious practices in which he engages:

I fast twice a week (well beyond what was expected)

I tithe upon all I possess (not just on the designated income)

We have no reason to believe the Pharisee's statement is not accurate.

His fasting

his piety;

and his compliance with God's laws

are not something to be ignored

and not to be disdained.

And it is important to note that the Pharisee is not being hypocritical.

In the parable he is all that he boasts that he is.

But he is on the wrong track,

his prayer is only about himself.

He all but congratulates God

on the excellence of His servant.

He glances at God but contemplates himself

He perceives there is a bargain in which

he has done more

Than the bargain required

And that God is in his debt.

The spirit of his prayer is all wrong.  
 He is smug  
 Self-satisfied  
 And believes he is in no need of grace.  
 He doesn't need God,  
 Because his confidence is clearly in himself.

His prayer asks for nothing other than for God to be impressed  
 with his vast accomplishments. For which he takes all the credit.

In Prayer as in everything else we do,  
 it matters what we do  
 but the spirit in which we do it is of equal concern.  
 In Christianity the ends never justify the means.

Even righteous acts without compassion are not considered  
 righteous by God.

*For every one that exalteth himself shall be abased*

Let's turn to the publican's prayer:  
 "God be merciful to me, a sinner".

He makes no excuses,  
 Cites no mitigating circumstances,  
 Offers no explanation.  
 He takes full responsibility for his acts  
 and his sin  
 and he seeks God's mercy.

For the publican to ask for forgiveness  
 and restoration of his relationship with God  
 is a bold  
 and faith filled act  
 for a man so despised by his society.

He needs no help in pointing out his sins  
     Harbors no illusions  
     Makes no claim on God's favor.  
 He comes empty handed;  
     Nothing to brag about  
     Nothing to offer but his sins.  
 He is humble and repentant ,  
     but his faith has made him bold  
     to ask for something  
     that he has no right to expect—  
         forgiveness and restoration with God.

*and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted*

Jesus now pronounces judgment:

“I tell you this man (the publican) went down to his house justified rather than the other.”

“Justified” in the King James Bible means: to be as if innocent in the eyes of God.

By his faith, the publican leaves the temple cleansed of his sins, as if they never occurred; the blood of Christ has blotted them out. Jesus shed the same blood on the same cross for both the good and the bad, even a Publican.

The Pharisee's pride led him to believe that he was on equal footing with his creator and could enter into a bargain with God.

He saw God only as a scorekeeper:  
     As long as he obeys the rules  
     He was self confident of heavenly life.

But our confidence is in God not self.

In today's Epistle, St Paul describes the role of grace that we see in the publican. He lists all the people who saw the risen Jesus and then says that he saw him last, as if he were born out of time. He describes himself as the least of the apostles,

not meet to even be called an apostle.

He cites as the reason;

that he persecuted the Church.

He says "I am what I am and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain. I labored more abundantly than them all. Yet he reminds us, "not I, but the grace of God which was with me".

Paul knows

of his abundant labor

and of all the Churches that he established.

He knows that his accomplishments exceed those of other apostles.

But unlike the Pharisee

Paul knows that it was only by the Grace of God,

that gift from God

that brought Paul closer to Him;

it was only by that Grace

that Paul labored.

It was only by that Grace

that Paul accomplished so much for us

and for the Church.

The Pharisee would have listed all his accomplishments and exalted only himself and told God how much better he was than the others;

Paul says he shouldn't even be called an apostle and that his labor was by the Grace of God.

The contrast between the Pharisee and the Publican is not only between hypocrisy and humility. As we have seen the Pharisee is no hypocrite—all he said of himself was true.

The lesson for us is that  
The Pharisee's condemnation lay  
In his presumption of making  
An equation between his own good works  
And the exalted Grace of God.

The Publican realized, (and we too must know)  
the incommensurable difference  
between  
God's holiness  
And his own abasement.

The Publican recognized that it was  
Not equitable justice  
But only  
The infinity of divine compassion  
That could balance his equation.

We must pray every day "Lord have mercy on me, a sinner".

The Pharisee left the temple as he had come in.  
The publican left a new man.

As we leave St Thomas today  
Will we?