

## **Lost and Found**

Parables of Jesus: Part 11 “Looking Down”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – October 31, 2021

23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

**Readings:** Luke 18:9-14

**Reflection:** Psalm 43

**Greeting:** Lord, your word has been tried and tested. How we love your word and remember your precepts. Your instruction is true! Your commandments are our joy! Help me understand so I can live! Praise the Lord! (*Psalm 119*)

**Prayer:** Almighty God, the author of our lives. We yearn to hear the word that you have for us today. Help us to lift up our ears that we may hear you. Open our eyes that we may see you. Rest upon our hearts that we may experience your love more deeply so that we may share that love with the world. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 43

*Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people; from those who are deceitful and unjust deliver me! For you are the God in whom I take refuge; why have you cast me off? Why must I walk about mournfully because of the oppression of the enemy? O send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling. Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy; and I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God. Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.*  
(*Psalm 43 NRSV\**)

We read the words of Psalm 43 and hear of God’s help and strength. That we should seek out God to deliver us. That God is to be our hope and our refuge. What is the hope that God gives you when you are down? Does God inspire you to be a better person? What are the ways in which you praise God for his unending love and grace? How do you lift others up in Jesus’ name? How can we share in the hope of Christ’s redeeming grace?

**Prayer:** O God, teach us to listen more closely. Guide us in understanding your ways so that we may grow together in wisdom. Help us to humble ourselves before you and to help each other in your name. Help us to rest in our risen Savior. Hear our prayers on this day, raised up in Jesus’ name, and show mercy to your children. May your Spirit guide us to peace and light everlasting. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

**Sermon:**

Our scripture reading for today comes from the Common English Bible. Our reading for today comes from Luke chapter 18 verses 9 through 14.

*Jesus told this parable to certain people who had convinced themselves that they were righteous and who looked on everyone else with disgust: “Two people went up to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed about himself with these words, ‘God, I thank you that I’m not like everyone else—crooks, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week. I give a tenth of everything I receive.’ But the tax collector stood at a distance. He wouldn’t even lift his eyes to look toward heaven. Rather, he struck his chest and said, ‘God, show mercy to me, a sinner.’ I tell you, this person went down to his home justified rather than the Pharisee. All who lift themselves up will be brought low, and those who make themselves low will be lifted up.” (Luke 18:9-14 CEB+)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

So, the parable for today is a favorite of mine. And one of the reasons is that the prayer contained in it is one that I use on a regular basis. And I think that in this short reading, we get a very profound truth. In our reading from Luke's Gospel for today, Jesus tells a parable and he tells it to, as we are told, “certain people who had convinced themselves that they were righteous and who looked on everyone else with disgust.” Now, this is an interesting reason to be telling a parable in the first place. I think that even just pausing for a moment to reflect on the why really helps to open us up to how deep this can go. This parable addresses something that we see all the time and don't always recognize it. And so, we have Jesus telling this parable so that the people looking down on others would reflect. We begin with two guys who are in the temple to pray. One a Pharisee and one a tax collector. The holy man versus the outcast sinner. And the Pharisees prayer is well, sad. He is thankful he's not like crooks and evil doers and adulterers or even like that tax collector over there. “Thank God I'm not that guy? I follow the rules. I give what I should give. I practice my spiritual disciplines like I should.” And then we get the tax collector. He doesn't even want to raise his eyes. He's standing at a distance, ashamed to get too close. And we get this prayer: “God show mercy to me, a sinner.” And then Jesus gives the honest truth. The tax collector goes away justified, and the Pharisee doesn't. And we get a common teaching in the Gospels. Those that build themselves up, those that puff themselves up, they will be brought low. And those that humble themselves and make themselves low will be lifted up.

Now the reason that this prayer is a favorite one is because I think in many ways it's the simplest and most honest prayer we can give. We have lots of examples of prayers and lots of ways we can pray, but I know this is one I say all the time. And I say it here every week. Now you may ask yourself when because you haven't heard me say that prayer aloud. But any time

that we have silent prayer, anytime there's a pause, this is the prayer that comes to me easiest. Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner. The reason I think this is such an easy prayer for me is that in its simplicity it recognizes two great things. That I need God's help, and that God's help is there. I need God's love and God's love is there. I need God's mercy and God's mercy is there. I don't have to spell out what my sins are. God knows them. I don't have to proclaim how terrible and fallen I am, pushing myself into the mud. But instead, it's a prayer that recognizes that I fail while recognizing that God can help me succeed. Before I lift myself up and think that I am especially worthy to God, I remember that we all have failings and I recognize them in myself so that I don't judge them in others. And that's the failing that we see with the Pharisee looking down on everyone else, blind to his own failings because he thinks he is so much better. Now there is of course the very fun problem that we can run into, thinking that if I pray this way and I lower myself, that makes me so much better. And then there we are again, wanting to judge others by what we are willing to admit about ourselves, without thinking about what the full ramifications of that are. It's an easy thing to do.

It's an easy thing to look at somebody and go "I'm glad that's not me." You can look at somebody with different political views and go "thank God I don't share their views." We can look at people with a difference of opinion on almost any matter, anywhere. You want a great example of it? You can find it in clergy. You can look at the church and most all of the divisions that we end up having, the things that drive us apart, are when we begin to think of ourselves the same way that that Pharisee does. "Thank God I'm not like them. Because I know God's sides with me. Thank God that God thinks the same way I do." Now you might say "Well, doesn't God share my views?" Sorry, but you are asking the wrong guy. Now that might sound strange at first. How can I serve and worship God if I don't know if he thinks like I do? Because God will never think like we do! We shouldn't strive to hope that we think like God because we can't. This is laid out for us in many different ways. That God's ways are not our ways. That when Job and his friends are discussing everything, God pops up and asks, "how much do you really understand about me?" Constantly, Jesus is having to correct the disciples and point back in the right direction. And that often happens when we start thinking too much that God thinks like us, and we look down on others. And when we're looking down that's when we are most likely to see Christ, down there helping to lift others up.

So, this is tough teaching. It's tough because we all want to think, "I am like the tax collector" and feel good about it. And we have to ask, why do we feel good about it? Do we feel good about it because then we're not like the Pharisee? Because doesn't that make us just like the Pharisee? Now you might say "oh gosh, you're just killing all the joy in this, aren't you?" I would say no, not killing the joy but redirecting the joy because there is plenty to be joyful about. And it comes back to that prayer. "God show your mercy to a sinner like me, because I know your help is there." And there's the joy. Because if we truly believe that God's mercy is there and that God's love is there for us, that Christ has opened the door for us to be able to reach out and say we need that help and for Christ to go well here it is. Then it enables us to

share in that love and share in that mercy. To let his love be our love and to let his mercy be our mercy. Instead of looking down on people and going “Gosh, how sad it must be to have your problems, to have your views” that we say Christ is there for me and I know Christ is there for you, and there's got to be something bigger than our division. Because if God loves a sinner like me then how great is God's love? And how much must there be to love in all God's creation? It enables us to go beyond self.

God doesn't want us to sit there just kicking ourselves either. He doesn't want us to be made low by thinking that we are unworthy worms unable to ever do anything. Because then we get completely the wrong idea too. If we beat ourselves up to the point that we refuse to ever ask for that mercy, then we never open ourselves up to receiving that love. Because that love shouldn't be something we always look at and think that we are never going to have but it should be something that we look at and think that love is for me, and that love is for us. No matter who that us is. Because when we view ourselves, not looking down on others but with others, then it means that we are in community. That we are together, not separated by whatever opinions it is that we think cause us to be so divided that we can never be together, but to be united because we are loved, and we are all offered the same mercy and grace.

And on top of that, above all else, simply that we are loved. That we are not wretched, and we are not without hope. None of us is wretched beyond hope. None of us is so fallen that there is nothing for us. Because there's a love that wants to dwell within us and be extended through us. Not by looking down on others but by looking out for others. Not in seeing the world as so broken that nothing can be done to fix it, but that God loves us so much that he would suffer humiliation and death to expose us to that love. That we are not so unworthy as to always be looking down on ourselves, but that Christ has looked upon us with love and given us hope. Because that's what that prayer says to me. That God, if you love me in spite of my mistakes, you can love anyone in spite of their mistakes. And if you can love anyone in spite of a mistakes, Lord enable me to love anyone in spite of their mistakes. Don't let me see them as flawed people who I need to look down on because they need me but let me see them as objects of your love and mercy. That I need others. So that I can love. So that I can show mercy. So that I can be loved. So that I can receive mercy. So that even a sinner like me has hope. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession and Pardon:** God of grace and glory, we thank you that you judge us not by the perfection of our actions, but by our readiness to live boldly by faith. Help us, as individuals and as a congregation, to trust you and follow where you lead, that in Christ your name may be glorified in all the earth. May we find forgiveness in your love. Amen.

**Offering:** If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

### **Lord's Prayer**

**Dismissal with Blessing:** May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## **Our Current Series – Parables of Jesus**

Our series is *Parables of Jesus* and will be looking at different parables that Jesus told. Each week I will ask that you read and reflect on the parable coming up. Feel free to discuss it with others or to get together to read and study. I would love to hear your reflections after the Sunday message!

November 7th – *Something Valuable* – Matthew 13:44-46; Revelation 21:1-6

An All Saints Sunday reflection on how we live and finding value in life.

### **Prayer List**

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Angie Veach	Eric Veach
Cathy Devall	Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Nancy Hoke	Don Wells
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Annie McMorris
Dwight Parsons	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gable	Sage Martin
Dalton McFarland	Darrell Quick	Ruth Ann Finley	Sandy Starwalt
Jodie Bunch	Andie, Ed, Alex, & Katie Kulach	Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks
Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Bonnie Hite
Lavada Markwell	Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer	Martha Roberts
Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	Gene Laymon	Family of John Blade
Family of Charlie Henderson	Tom Finley	Family of Martha Hurst	

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