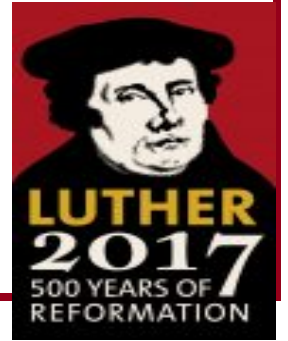


Ash Wednesday

Luke 18:9-14

March 1, 2017

Pastor Dave Bolte



A couple of weeks ago the **fourth grade class** of our school came over to the church and I talked to them about the various parts of the sanctuary. We talked about the chancel, the pulpit, the baptism font, the altar, the nave --- and the importance of these things. One of the things that we talked about that day applies to us tonight.

We talked about the entryway. Yes, the *entryway*! That's because in church architectural language, the entryway is called the NARTHEX. The word *narthex* comes from a Latin word that means *penitent and sorrow*. *It reminds us that we are to humble ourselves and be repentant and sorrowful of our sins before we come into the presence of God.*

When we walk through the narthex and into church, we remind ourselves that we are to be humble like the tax collector in the parable that Jesus taught us today, and not like the proud and self-righteous pharisee.

In the parable, the pharisee was proud and boastful; he was a long way from repentant and sorrowful for his sins. Look at the handout and note the way Jesus describes him:

"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' Luke 18:10-12

Pharisees were the religious leaders of the day, people who appeared to live good, clean lives. Many times in scripture, the pharisees made a show of their righteousness and good works.

The pharisee in this story is no different. He stands in church, in the temple, before God, boasting of his good works. **“God, I thank you that I am not like other men, robbers, evildoers, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.”** Basically, he’s saying, **“God, I’m a pretty good person.”**

Maybe he was right! He was a good citizen. He obeyed the law, he lived a moral and upright life. He even did the religious things you were supposed to do – he gave ten percent of his income to church, and he even fasted twice a week.

Can’t you relate to him a little bit?

Don’t you try to live a good life?

Don’t you avoid robbers, evildoers, and adulterers?

Don’t you worship, and tithe, and pray and do good works? ***Can’t we all relate to this Pharisee?***

Of course we can! The problem here is not his good works; rather, it’s **his attitude that his good works have made him righteous before God**. He is boasting before God about how good he is. He thinks God **owes** him something. He thinks he **deserves** to stand in the front of the church praying. He thinks he is **worthy** to stand before God because of his good works. **He completely refuses to humble himself, and acknowledge his sinful condition in God’s eyes.**

**In no uncertain terms,
Jesus condemns him for his self-righteous attitude.**

This is a strong warning for all of us: you too will be condemned you if you stand before God and boast of your own good works to earn God’s favor and salvation. Salvation is not by works; no man can boast before God. **Learn from this Pharisee** that you too will be condemned you if you try to stand before God and boast of your own good works!

In the Parable, there is another man, a **tax collector**, and he is so broken by sin that he can only stand in the **narthex**, he is repentant and sorrowful. He doesn't even come into the sanctuary. Here is how Jesus describes him:

The tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' Luke 18:13

This man knew he was sinful and unclean. Tax collectors were notorious for swindling people and stealing money from others. They lived evil lives, they had bad reputations, and they enjoyed cheating others out of their money.

But this tax collector was repentant. He was deeply troubled by his sin, his conscience was pierced with guilt, and his heart heavy with sorrow. Jesus notes four things about this man:

- 1) “**stood at a distance**” – he wouldn't even walk up to the front of the temple – he knew he was unworthy; he stayed in the **narthex**.
- 2) “**He would not even look up to heaven**” – he was so ashamed of his sin that he was embarrassed
- 3) he “**beat his breast**” -- a visible sign of inner turmoil and guilt
- 4) he said, “**God have mercy on me, a sinner.**” This was his heartfelt confession of sin.

This man was humble and repentant; he knew his sin and that he could only ask God for help. He knew that only God could have mercy and forgive him.

Jesus goes on to say that this sinful tax collector in the **narthex** was the one that was forgiven by God and not the self-righteous Pharisee in the front of the church.

The truth of the matter is, **neither** the pharisee nor the tax collector **deserved** God's forgiveness.

- The pharisee didn't because he was conceited and self-righteous – thought he was better than everybody else, he thought he was perfect. **He is condemned in his self-righteousness.**
- The tax collector didn't deserve God's forgiveness because of his sin that filled his life. **He is condemned in his unrighteousness.**

Neither one deserved to be forgiven by God. AND Neither do we.

No one here **deserves** to be forgiven, no one here is righteous in God's eyes.

God forgives you, not because you are good, but because He is merciful.

As a result of his undeserved love, God forgives you. God forgives you because Jesus Christ has taken away the sins of the world. Because of the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross, he cleansed the world of all of its sin, He offers forgiveness to all, including you. **God forgives you, not because you are good, but because He is merciful.**

Tonight, we are the **tax collector** in the story; we humble ourselves before God and confess our sins. These ashes that we put on tonight are our confession saying, **'God have mercy on me, a sinner!'** Only through faith in the Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, can we leave the **narthex** and come into God's presence. These ashes are a sign of **sorrow and repentance!**

But we also know that these ashes remind us of our Savior, who took our ashes upon Himself; He took our sins and our guilt and died in our place. He was there on a cross for you, to take your place. **God forgives you, not because you are good, but because He is merciful in His Son Jesus Christ!**

Now come, and put ashes on your forehead or your hand as a visible sign of repentance, and with a humble heart, confess to God 'God have mercy on me, a sinner! AMEN!