

Trinity XI, 2006
Text: Luke 19:9-14
Trinity Lutheran, Worden, IL & Zion Lutheran, Carpenter, IL
Pastor H. R. Curtis

✠Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ ✠

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

Jesus' parable for today is shocking and outrageous. You may have missed it because by now, after 2000 years of hearing the Gospel, we in the Church are accustomed to hearing the word 'Pharisee' and thinking 'bad guy;' and when we think of a tax-collector we might not be thrilled, but we know he's just doing his job, a decent chap after all. But if we hear this parable this way, we will have missed the point of our Lord – so let us tell it in a way that will hit our ears as it hit the ears of the disciples.

Two men came into church to pray. The first was a Church bureaucrat from St. Louis. He was dressed in sharp, dark, conservative suit. He had gone to the seminary and gotten his pastor's degree and now he spent his life helping the Church to grow by leading seminars on godly living. He gave a tenth of his income to his home congregation. He knew that being faithful to his wife made for a happier home and that living honestly made life simplest and best. He kept the traditional fasts on Wednesday and Friday. And he came in to the church, knelt down in the first pew, crossed himself, folded his hands and began to pray. He had not only the whole liturgy but all the hymns memorized as well and sang with gusto. He had grown comfortable with his righteousness based on God's Law. He was a good egg and had no doubts about his eternal destiny. He was satisfied with his personal righteousness.

The other fellow who came in was a pimp from East St. Louis dressed in garish clothing and reeking of stale smoke. He had made his living as traitor to his community – pushing drugs, beating whores, and tempting children into his own wretched life. He stood at the back of the Church, would not come to the front or even sit in the very back pew. He couldn't bear to look up at the painting of our Lord and meet his eyes. Instead he stood with his head bowed, beating his chest with his fist as he wept: Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner.

I tell you the truth: only the second man went out of the Church and back to his house justified before God.

So repent. Stop trying to justify yourself. Stop arguing and trying to cut

deals with God. It's no good saying you're not as bad as so and so. It's not enough that you haven't cheated on your husband and love your children. It's not enough that you don't steal or cheat on your taxes. It's not enough that you're involved in the congregation. It's not enough that you try your best. None of these things can justify you – for none of them can justify your sins. Adultery is not only what happens in a bed, but what happens in your head – your lustful thoughts. Stealing is not just a matter of breaking and entering, but of wishing you had what is another's. And have you really always tried your best?

Repent. You cannot justify yourself with these excuses. God does not grade on a curve so there's no use comparing yourself to someone else. If you seek to be judged before God on your performance in keeping God's commandments you will fail that judgment. You will be condemned and go to hell. Even if you are outwardly as righteous as this Pharisee or Church bureaucrat – it will do you do good.

So instead stand alongside the pimp and the tax-collector and admit to God that you are a sinner. That you cannot justify yourself – that there is no excuse that can explain your sinfulness and make it OK. Give up. God's got you dead to rights. He has a simple Law and you have not met it.

Admit this, turn away from your self-justifications and turn toward God and receive his grace: for he shall justify you. None of your excuses were enough to save you – but God is merciful and loving and so he himself took up this problem of your sin upon himself. He Himself stepped into your flesh and bore your sins in his body. Our Lord Jesus Christ, God and Man in one person, perfectly Holy and Just, without stain or blemish of sin, died for you.

Those Gospel words are easy to say but they are almost impossible to comprehend. Scripture tells us that the wages of sin is death. Only sinners die because death is the punishment for sin. (This, by the way, is another proof of original sin – that we are sinners even from childhood – for babies are mortal as well.) So how could Jesus die? He is Holy and without sin. So how could death close our Lord's eyes and steal his breath?

No one takes the Life of Jesus from him, but he lays it down of his own accord. Of his own free will he stepped into your place and took your sin upon himself. As the Scriptures say, “God made him who knew no sin to become sin for us that we might become the righteous of God.” In Christ, God is justifying you. He justifies you not with an excuse, but by pouring out the punishment for your sin upon his Son. In Christ on the cross is the mercy of God.

And this mercy now washes over you as it spills from the side of Christ in a flow of blood and water. That water is the water of Holy Baptism in which you were buried with Christ into death. In this baptism you are made the child of God and your sins are forgiven. In this Baptism you are justified – fit to stand before

God, clean, pure – as clean and pure as Christ himself because you have now been brought into Christ through Baptism. You are now clothed in Christ.

But the grace of God is richer still – for he is not just satisfied to wash you and clothe you with Christ, there is not just a flow of water from Christ's side but also a flow of blood. This Blood is the Blood of the New Testament shed for you for the remission of sins. And so Christ fills you with Himself as he places on your tongue the Body that bore your sins and is now raised for your justification, as he pours his own life Blood down your throat.

So you are surrounded by Christ within and without. You are washed and clothed in Christ and Christ fills you with his living, real, and true Body and Blood that was born of Mary, suffered, died, and rose again. How could you not be an heir of eternal life? Christ has claimed you and made you his. He has surrounded you and he has filled you. God is now well-pleased with you. You are justified in his sight. So come, hasten to receive your Lord Jesus Christ again – be filled with his Body and Blood which bring you this forgiveness, life, and salvation. And after that you may go down to your house justified of God and in peace.

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

✠

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

✠