

Sermon Text

Luke 18:9-14 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this Parable: 10 "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.' 13 "But 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.' 14 "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

THIS SEASON IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

LENT is a season of intense preparation for Easter. It is also a time for deep meditation and reflection on the Word of God. We reflect on Holy Baptism and its basis in the death and Resurrection of Christ. We remember that although Baptism happened in time, still our Baptism plays a powerful and meaningful role in our everyday lives. As we daily contemplate our sins in the mirror of God's Law, we remember the covenant God made to us in Baptism: A covenant that He would be faithful in forgiving our sins unto everlasting Life.

As we daily return to Baptism in repentance and faith, we continue the cycle of the Christian life which will ultimately find its culmination in the final resurrection from the dead. *"...do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through Baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."* (Romans 6)

The liturgical color for the Lent season is **purple** which symbolizes penitence and self-discipline.

During the penitential season of Lent we omit the *Gloria in Excelsis Deo* and the *Alleluias* from the Divine Service. They will return to use again on Easter Morning.

✠ p.7 ✠



Our Savior Lutheran Church  Lakeland, FL 
Ash Wednesday  (LENT Begins) Prepare A Fast
February 10th, 2016 ✠ 4:30 pm



Woodcut illustration in a 1695 Bible – (Book of) Joel
A rendering of the prophet Joel declaring a fast.

✠ OUR SAVIOR LUTHERAN CHURCH ✠

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BIBLE CLASS 8:30 AM WORSHIP 9:30 AM FELLOWSHIP 10:45 AM

✠ A.R. Burmeister 430-5859 ✠ Organ: Janice Thomas (813) 650-9198

February 10, 2016 ✠ Ash Wednesday = Prepare a Fast

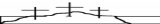
WELCOME to Our Savior! We are so happy to have you worship with us today. If you are visiting us for the first time (or in a long time), we ask that you please fill out a visitor card found in the pew cardholder and place it in the offering plate. Come and worship with us again! **God bless you.**

OUR ORDER OF WORSHIP Printed here and in **black** (ELH) Hymnary **p.120**

Service		
Opening Hymn	287 (6v)	Jesus, I Will Ponder Now
Hymn of the Day	240 (3v)	Jesus, Refuge of the Weary
Evening Hymn	561 (8v)	<i>Sing 1-2,7-8</i> Abide With Me, Fast Falls

Suggested Bible readings for the weekdays after Quinquagesima Sunday

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Exodus 14:1-31	Exo. 15:1-21	Exo. 15:22-16:36	Exo. 17:1-16	Exo. 19:1-25	Exo. 20:1-23
Mark 10:1-31	Mark 10:32-52	Mark 11:1-33	Mark 12:13-44	Luke 4:14-44	Luke 5:12-39

PROPERs for ASH WEDNESDAY  (START OF LENT) **FEB 10TH**

INTROIT I will cry to God Most High, to God who performs all things for me. Yes, in the shadow of Your wings I make my refuge, until these calamities are past. Be merciful to Me, O God, be merciful to me, for my soul trusts in You.
...from **Psalms 57**

COLLECT Almighty and everlasting God, You hate nothing that You have made and You forgive the sins of all those who are penitent; Create and make in us new and contrite hearts that we, who worthily lament our sins and acknowledge our wretchedness, may obtain from You, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives, and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever,
C: ♪ A - - men.

GRADUAL C: Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for my soul trusts in You. He will send from heaven and save me from the accusation of him who would swallow me up.
...from **Psalms 103**

SCRIPTURE LESSONS *(printed on inside back page 6 of the bulletin)*

OT **Joel 2:12-19** The Lord calls His people to *true* repentance.
Ep. **II Corinthians 5:20-6:10** Do not receive God's Grace in vain.
Go. **Matthew 6:16-21** Do the Father's Will for the *right* reasons.

2016-LENT MIDWEEK SERMONS THEME: (GREAT) IRONIES OF THE PASSION
TONIGHT (ASH WED., PHARISEE & PUBLICAN) THIS MAN WENT HOME JUSTIFIED

Historic Lessons for Ash ✠ Wednesday (40 days pre-Easter)

Old Testament

Joel 2:12-19 NIV 'Even now,' declares the LORD, 'return to Me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.' 13 Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and He relents from sending calamity. 14 Who knows? He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing – grain offerings and drink offerings for the LORD your God. 15 Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly. 16 Gather the people, consecrate the assembly; bring together the elders, gather the children, those nursing at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber. 17 Let the priests, who minister before the LORD, weep between the temple porch and the altar. Let them say, 'Spare Your people, O LORD. Do not make Your inheritance an object of scorn, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?' 18 Then the LORD will be jealous for His land and take pity on His people. 19 The LORD will reply to them: 'I am sending you grain, new wine and oil, enough to satisfy you fully; never again will I make you an object of scorn to the nations.

Epistle

II Corinthians 5:20-6:10 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21 God made Him Who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. 6:1 As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. 2 For He says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the Day of Salvation. 3 We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. 4 Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; 5 in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; 6 in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; 7 in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; 8 through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; 9 known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; 10 sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

Gospel

Matthew 6:16-21 "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, Who is unseen; and your Father, Who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. 19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

✠ p.6 ✠

The **VERSICLE** *P: ♪ Let my prayers rise before you as incense:*

C: ♪ And the lifting up of my hands-- As the ev'ning sacrifice.

The **NUNC DIMITTIS** ("Lord, let us Depart in Peace"...music on page 124)

**C: ♪ 1. Lord, now You let Your servant ... de-part in peace:
Accord-... -ing to You Word.**

**2. For mine eyes have seen... Your Sal-va-tion;
Which You have prepared before the face... of all peo-ple.**

**3. A-- Light to light- ... -en the Gen-tiles:
And the glory of Your... peo-ple Isra-el.**

4. Glory be to the Father ... and to the Son / And to... the Holy Ghost;

5. As it was in the beginning, is now, and... ever shall be / Forev-... er-more, A-men.

KYRIE ELEISON (*Lord Have Mercy*) **C: ♪ Lord, have mercy upon us. -
Christ, have mercy upon us. - Lord, have mercy upon us.**

The **LORD'S PRAYER** (*Congregation and Pastor pray together*)

**C: Our Father, Who art in heaven, Hal-low-ed be- Thy Name--;
Thy Kingdom come-, Thy Will be done on earth as it is in heav-en;
Give us this day our dai-ly bread; And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
And lead us not- into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

For Thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory Forever and ever.

C: ♪ A- - - - -men.

The (Evening) **COLLECT** (*Pastor prays, Congregation: ♪ Amen*)

P: (Let us pray:) O God, from Whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works proceed, Give Your servants that peace which the world cannot give, that our hearts may be set to obey Your Commandments, And also that we, being defended by You from the fear of our enemies, may pass our time in rest and quietness; through the merits of Jesus Christ, our Saviour, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God now and forever.

C: ♪ A- - -men.

The **BENEDICAMUS** *P: ♪ Let us bless the Lord. C: ♪ Thanks be to God.*

The **BENEDICTION** *P: ♪ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, And the love of God, And the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. C: ♪ A- - -men.*

CLOSING HYMN *Abide With Me ELH #561 vv1-2,7-8 HFLyte EVENTIDE*

**1. Abide with me! Fast falls the eventide; - The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide.
When other helpers fail and comforts flee, - Help of the helpless, oh, abide with me!**

**2. Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day; Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see. O Thou, who changest not, abide with me!**

**7. I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless; Ills have no weight and tears no bitterness.
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory? I triumph still if Thou abide with me.**

**8. Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes, / Shine through the gloom, and point me to
the skies. / Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;**

IN LIFE, IN DEATH, O LORD, ABIDE WITH ME! AMEN.

Silent Prayer (Candles out.) **You may be seated. ~ p.5 ~ FELLOWSHIP.**



I. The Service of Vespers ELH p.120



OPENING HYMN: "Jesus, I Will Ponder Now" ELH #287 (6 verses) JESU,

**1. Jesus, I will ponder now - On Thy holy Passion;
With Thy Spirit me endow - For such meditation.**

**Grant that I in love and faith - May the image cherish
Of Thy suffering, pain, and death, - That I may not perish.**

**2. Make me see Thy great distress, - Anguish, and affliction,
Bonds and stripes and wretchedness - And Thy crucifixion;
Make me see how scourge and rod, - Spear and nails, did wound Thee,
How for man Thou diedst, O God, - Who with thorns had crowned Thee.**

**3. Yet, O Lord, not thus alone - Make me see Thy Passion,
But its cause to me make known - And its termination.
Ah! I also and my sin - Wrought Thy deep affliction;
This indeed the cause hath been - Of Thy crucifixion.**

**4. Grant that I Thy Passion view - With repentant grieving
Nor Thee crucify anew - By unholy living.
How could I refuse to shun - Every sinful pleasure
Since for me God's only Son - Suffered without measure?**

**5. If my sins give me alarm - And my conscience grieve me,
Let Thy cross my fear disarm, - Peace of conscience give me.
Grant that I may trust in Thee - And Thy holy Passion.
If His Son so loveth me, - God must have compassion.**

**6. Grant that I may willingly - Bear with Thee my crosses,
Learning humbleness of Thee, - Peace mid pain and losses.
May I give Thee love for love! - Hear me, O my Savior,
That I may in heaven above - Sing Thy praise forever. Amen.**



The INVOCATION (*Congregation please rise if you are able.*)

P: In the Name of the Father, and of the Son ✕, and of the Holy Spirit. C: Amen.

P: Makes haste O God, to deliver me. C: Make haste to help me, O Lord.

P: The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit.

**C: A broken spirit and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.
Glory be to the Father and to the Son And to the Holy Ghost; As it was
in the beginning, is now, And every shall be; forevermore. Amen.**

The CONFESSION OF SINS & ABSOLUTION

CORPORATE CONFESSION & ABSOLUTION (*Use ELH p.130-132 Form II*)

P: I now ask you, in the presence of God, Who searches the heart:

*Do you sincerely confess that you have sinned against God and deserve
His wrath and punishment?*

C: I do so confess.

✕ p.2 ✕

(continue, next page 3 ↗)

P: Truly you should confess, for Holy Scripture declares: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

*Do you heartily **repent** of all your sins committed in thought, word and deed?*

C: I do repent.

P: Truly you should repent, as did the penitent sinners: King David, who prayed for a contrite heart; Peter, who wept bitterly; the sinful woman; the prodigal son; and others.

*Do you sincerely **believe** that God, by grace, for Jesus' sake, will forgive you all your sins?*

C: I do so believe.

*P: Truly you should believe, for Holy Scripture declares: "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should **not** perish, but have everlasting life*

*Do you **promise** that by the power of the Holy Spirit you will amend your sinful life?*

C: I do so promise.

P: Truly you should promise, for Christ our Lord says: "Let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

Finally, Do you believe that through me, a called servant of God, you will receive the forgiveness of all your sins?

C: I do so believe.

P: Truly you should believe, for Christ our Lord says: "Whoever hears you, hears Me" and "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them."

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The ABSOLUTION (Form II. ELH p.132)

P: Upon this your confession, By the authority of God and my holy office I declare to you the gracious forgiveness of all your sins, in the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

May He Who has begun the good work in you perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. Peace be with you. Amen.

The INTROIT (Spoken by the Pastor – see **page 1** for words.)

The VERSICLES ELH, p. 120

P: ♪ O Lord, open my lips. C: ♪ And my mouth will show forth Your praise.

P: ♪ Make haste, O God, to deliver me. C: ♪ Make haste to help me, O Lord.

The GLORIA PATRI C: ♪ **Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and- to- the Holy Ghost. - As it was in the beginning; is now, and ever shall be, for-ev-er-more. - A-men.** (No Alleluia - Lent)

The COLLECT (Prayer for Ash Wednesday, words on **page 1** – Pastor prays.)

C: Amen. (after the Collect...) **The congregation may be seated.**

✠ p.3 ✠

II. The Service of The Word – 5. The Lektion p.121

EITHER (bulletin p.6 Readings)

Historic Lessons for Ash ✠ Wednesday (40 days before Easter)

OLD TESTAMENT: Joel 2:12-19 Lord calls His people to *true* repentance.

EPISTLE: II Corinthians 5:20-6:10 Do not receive God's Grace in vain.

GOSPEL: Matthew 6:16-21 Do the Father's Will for the *right* reasons.

OR

History of the Suffering & Death of our Lord Jesus Christ
according to Four Evangelists + The Wartburg Project Version ©2014.

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FIRST READING ✠ **The Preparation of the Passover Lamb**

RESPONSORY (After the readings)

P: ♪ O Lord, have mercy upon us. C: ♪ Thanks be to You, O Lord!

APOSTLES' CREED (Confession of Faith, on ELH p.46) **All say together:**

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord;

Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary;

Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried;

He descended into Hell; the Third Day he Rose again from the dead;

He ascended into heaven and is seated at the Right Hand of God the Father Almighty

From there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints, the Forgiveness of sins, the Resurrection of the body, and the Life ✠ everlasting.

Amen. △ (Congregation may be seated for the next hymn.)

✠ ♪ △ ✠ ✠ ✠ ✠ ✠ ✠ ✠ ✠

SERMON HYMN *Jesus, Refuge of the Weary* ELH #240 (3 verses) O DU LIEBE

**1. Jesus, Refuge of the weary, Blest Redeemer, whom we love,
Fountain in life's desert dreary, Savior from the world above,
Oh, how oft Thine eyes, offended, Gaze upon the sinner's fall!
Yet, upon the Cross extended, Thou didst bear the pain of all.**

**2. Do we pass that Cross unheeding, Breathing no repentant vow,
Though we see Thee wounded, bleeding, See Thy thorn-encircled brow?
Yet Thy sinless death hath brought us Life eternal, peace, and rest;
Only what Thy grace hath taught us Calms the sinner's stormy breast.**

**3. Jesus, may our hearts be burning With more fervent love for Thee!
May our eyes be ever turning To Thy cross of agony
Till in glory, parted never From the blessed Savior's side,
Graven in our hearts forever Dwell the Cross, the Crucified!**

SERMON Text: Luke 18:9-14 (p.7) **IRONY #1: 1 MAN WENT HOME JUSTIFIED**

✠ p.4 ✠

(LENT.0) ASH WEDNESDAY Luke 18:9-14 **"WENT HOME JUSTIFIED!"** 02.10.16

INTRODUCTION --This Man Went Home Justified-- *"It's not my fault!"* Does that sound familiar? If you're a **teacher**, you've probably heard a student say that. If you're a **supervisor**, you've probably heard it from an employee. **What almost always follows that statement?** That person attempts to justify himself or herself. And what does that mean? They make an excuse for what they did. They try to shift the blame and get out of whatever consequences might be coming. It's **kind of ironic** that we use the word *justify* for that, because **justify is one of the most important words in the Bible**. It means that God declares us not guilty in his courtroom. But when we use it in everyday speech, it almost always means that we make an excuse. That subtle difference illustrates the **theme of our Lenten devotions**. This year, we'll hear about **IRONY**. One dictionary defines *irony* as "a combination of circumstances or a result that is the opposite of what might be expected." Jesus' Passion is filled with irony. Tonight, we're considering a Parable Jesus told. What is the irony, the unexpected result? **This man went home justified.**

I. Now, maybe this Parable doesn't seem all that ironic to us. But the Gospel promises a result that is the opposite of what anyone would have the right to expect. Jesus wanted his hearers to be surprised when he told them that **this man went home justified, not the man who tried to follow God's laws.**

Jesus told this Parable to people who were confident of their own righteousness and who looked down on everyone else. Two men went up to the temple in Jerusalem to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee prayed, *"God, I thank you that I am not like other people - robbers, evildoers, adulterers - or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get."* We cringe at that prayer, right? But how did the audience to whom Jesus was speaking react? They thought they were righteous, so Jesus did **not** tell a story that would sound ridiculous to them. He didn't want them to simply dismiss his comments as a caricature of the people he was talking to. So how did this man sound to them?

One of the ironies of this Parable is **how we react to the word "Pharisee."** To us, that word means proud and self-righteous. We can't imagine a Pharisee as anything other than a hypocrite. The Gospels back up that assessment. **But to the first-century Jew, Pharisee** meant something else. St. Paul was raised a Pharisee, and he was proud of that label before he came to faith. The Pharisees were the people who defended a strict interpretation of the Old Testament Law. They held that it really was the Word of God and that it really was true, unlike the Sadducees who were more like the theological liberals of many churches today.

So when this man said that he was not a robber or an evildoer or an adulterer - that was true. He didn't break into people's houses or shoplift. He had never committed any crime that could get him thrown in jail. He didn't sleep around. To put it in modern terms, he didn't even have a traffic ticket. And to any first-century Jewish observer, there was a clear difference between him and the **tax collector**. Tax collectors were collaborators. They worked for the Romans, who had conquered the Jewish nation, and they collected taxes from their own people. The Romans let the tax collectors collect far more than the government required and then keep the difference. Again and again in the Gospels, we also see them in the company of **prostitutes** and **sinner**s. You're known by the company you keep. Even more important, you're influenced by the company you keep. Without a doubt, many tax collectors plunged into all kinds of sin. Not only did this Pharisee avoid all that, but he gave 10 percent of his income to the Lord, just like the Old Testament Laws commanded. He fasted twice a week. God commanded in the Law of Moses only one fast per year. So, it's pretty easy to see why this man would be pleased with the kind of man he was. **Jesus' listeners would identify with him.**

So what was the problem? It was the **pride** of his heart. One of the **great ironies we learn from Scripture** is that even though we might be doing the right thing, if it's for the wrong reason, **we're still guilty of sin**. This man was confident of his own righteousness. He thought he was earning points with God by what he was doing. He thought that he was coming out ahead in God's record book. Why wasn't he? Because he ignored everything God said in the Old Testament about needing a new heart, about approaching God with humility, and about being a sinner who is saved by God's mercy.

Another great irony of Scripture is that people who think they can keep God's laws always seem to have to rewrite those laws. They always cut off the parts they can't keep - like having a pure heart and a humble spirit or avoiding lust and greed and coveting. Then they add things they can do - like fasting twice a week or giving a tenth of their income to church. They then tell themselves that they are doing God's will. That simply is not true. This man was not justified. In God's court, he was still guilty.

My friends, **could we ever be confident of our own righteousness?** Could we **ever** echo this man's prayer? *"I thank you, God, that we in our church, in our synod, are not like other churches. We practice the doctrine of church fellowship and we avoid praying with people not of our fellowship. We maintain purity of doctrine and practice, and we discipline those who refuse to conform to Your Word. We're not like the Catholic or the Methodist or the Presbyterian church down the street."* Or maybe we could make it a little more personal: *"I thank you, Lord, that I am not like other people in this pornographic and materialistic society. I avoid*

Internet sites that no one should look at. I don't beat my wife or children. I don't use drugs. I stay out of trouble. And look at all I do for my congregation - I've been president of the council or the Ladies' Guild. I give my appropriate 5 or 10 percent of my income to the church. I never miss a Lenten service, and I always help prepare the meals."

Could WE offer that prayer? If we did, what would be wrong with it? Doesn't God command us to observe the biblical fellowship principle and to avoid praying with people who don't share our confession? Doesn't God command us to keep His doctrine pure and to stand on the truth? He most certainly does. And he expects us to follow that command. I'm not in any way saying that those things are unimportant. Likewise, He does expect us to avoid Internet sites that lead us to lust. He does expect us to love our spouses and children. He does call us to support the work of the church with our offerings, our time, and our talents.

So what is the problem? The same problem this Pharisee had - **PRIDE**. If we're doing all that because we think we're righteous before God, if we break our arms patting ourselves on the back for all we do, if we ignore the areas of our hearts and lives where we sin and tell ourselves that we're better Christians than all those others, then we have done nothing that God considers righteous. We are sinners, born and bred. Sin corrupts even our best efforts and **makes them filthy rags in God's sight**.

Jesus is the only reason God accepts our efforts. He died and paid for the sin in our hearts that contaminates every effort we ever make to serve God. He died and paid for the pride and sin that cuts off those parts of God's law we cannot do and that adds things God never commanded. His sufferings and death erase all of God's record of our sin. And his resurrection makes us perfect in God's sight. Because God sees Jesus when he looks at us, what we do here pleases him. Because **we have been declared righteous** because of what Jesus did for us - justified, to use the Biblical term - we want to serve our Lord with our offerings, our time, and our effort. Because of Jesus and his mercy, we do all those difficult things, like refusing to pray with people who don't share our confession or avoiding temptation in our entertainment choices. Knowing God's mercy in Christ is the key difference that Jesus illustrated with these two sinners who went up to the temple to pray.

II. The irony in this Parable is that the man who thought of himself as a committed, churchgoing follower of God failed to grasp the meaning of repentance for a new life. But the man who lived a sinful life understood what it means to repent, and he threw himself on God's mercy. **This man, who humbled himself before God, went home justified.**

The tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even lift his eyes to heaven. He prayed simply, **"God, have mercy on me, a sinner."** He understood that he could make no defense in God's courtroom. In our

society, even the most obviously guilty criminals have a right to a defense in court. They can hire a lawyer. They can try to convince the jury that they really didn't do whatever they're accused of. They can sing and dance and argue, and sometimes it even works. But in God's courtroom, there are no lawyers' games. There are no technicalities. There are no miscarriages of justice. God has all the evidence before him because he knows all that we've done and said and even all that we've thought and felt.

This **tax collector didn't lie to himself** about his righteousness. He understood that the only verdict God's court could possibly render was **guilty**. So he threw himself on God's mercy. What is mercy? It's the desire to help someone who's in trouble. It's what we feel when we see news reports about cities destroyed by hurricanes, and so we send money to buy blankets and medicine. God **has** mercy on sinners. He knows that we deserve to die and go to hell, but He loves us and wants us to reach Heaven. So He sent His Son to live and die and rise again to wipe away all record of our sin.

In His mercy, He comes to us in his Word and tells us that Good News. In his Word He touches our broken hearts and gives us faith and hope to stand before Him and confess our sin and plead for forgiveness. In its simplest form, repentance is longing for God's mercy. It begins with humility - with brutal honesty about our own guilt and our inability to earn forgiveness. Then, repentance clings to Christ in faith. We ask for mercy for this day's sins because we know mercy is coming. Then, God justifies us personally. He doesn't make excuses for our sins. He does **not** say, *"Well, they didn't know any better. They live in a society that's growing more and more anti-Christian every day. I'm just glad they're trying hard."* (No,) **God does something better**. He comes to us in the Gospel and **declares us NOT GUILTY**. He reminds us that he washed our sins away in Baptism. He gives us personally the life and death and Resurrection of Jesus, so we know that in His courtroom, the **finding in our file is NOT GUILTY**.

CONCLUSION No one who clings in faith to Jesus can say, *"I thank you, God, that I'm not like other people."* True faith is truly **humble**: *"I thank you, God, that you don't give me what I deserve. I thank you, God, that you have had mercy on me. No one knows better than you how guilty I really am. But you declared me not guilty. You gave me love and forgiveness. For that I thank you, Lord."*

Irony is written all over the Gospel. We will explore it more this year during Lent. But Jesus himself illustrated that irony when He spoke this parable. God cares about your heart. God cares about your faith. No matter how sinful you have been, you will live with Him in Heaven. Trust him. Admit your guilt to him and cling to His mercy in Christ. Go home today justified—declared not guilty. **Amen.** **SDG**