



ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

**Eleventh Sunday after Trinity
August 27, 2017**

**✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen.**

The passage selected for the Sermon this morning is taken from the Gospel:

“God, have mercy on me,
a sinner.”

Because we have the luxury of reading Scripture and the perspective that comes from history, we tend to see the Pharisees as the bad guys. They are the ones who are setting traps for Jesus. They are the ones who have made the Temple a den of thieves. They are the ones who plot and betray Jesus, passing judgment on him and turning him over to be crucified.

Our perspective leads us to see this parable as Jesus getting off a shot at the bad guys who are out to get him. Sometimes however, that perspective, knowing the end of the story even as we read it, leads us to drastically wrong conclusions. In fact, when Jesus tells this parable, He is attacking the good guys. This whole lesson can be seen as outrageous and unjust criticism on that same level of shock that we would feel if Thomas Jefferson came back to tell us the Neo Nazis and Antifas of Charlottesville were true patriots in comparison to us.

The prayer this Pharisee offers is not such a bad prayer. In fact, the Pharisee is living a life we would very much approve. He goes to Temple when he should. He follows the proper rituals. He is a pillar of the Community. He takes his faith and his position seriously. He offers the full amount of the tithe, holding nothing back from God of the blessings he has received.

If the Pharisee were here today, we would be glad to see him in our pew. He would know the prayers and the hymns, and say or sing them beautifully. He would appreciate the glories of Morning Prayer. The Treasurer, and the priests, would be very glad to see his envelope in the plate. How much better our Sunday worship would be if the Pharisee replaced the people who talk too much, don't respect our meditation and preparation, come dressed too casually, butcher the hymns and can never find their envelope when the plate is in their row.

We would be so comfortable because the Pharisee is us. The good Church going people who appear to do everything right on the outside, but who still trust in ourselves and our righteousness, while we pass judgment on those who don't meet our standards. To be found wanting over the likes of the Publican would be

far worse than being compared unfavorably to the people we despise most.

Publicans were traitors. They were the Jews who did the dirty work of collecting taxes for the oppressors, who served the occupying Roman force. Not only that, they abused that power. Taking more from their people than the needed and padding their own pockets. They employed thugs to enforce their collections, threatening and doing serious harm. To be seen in the eyes of God as wanting in comparison to the Publican should have been a powerful lesson.

Of course, man doesn't relinquish his pride easily. It is important that we remember who this lesson was intended for. Jesus was not preaching to the Pharisee or the Publican. He was surrounded by his disciples, principally the Apostles. Their reaction to this lesson is sadly revealed in the next two incidents that follow this Gospel.

First, women try to bring their young children to Jesus. The reaction of the Apostles is to try to chase the children away. Jesus fortified the lesson of the Pharisee and the Publican when he rebuked their efforts and reminded them the they all, and we all, have to come to Christ as little children.

From that lesson, they journey on and encounter a blind man. Hearing that it is Jesus that is near him, the blind man cries out to Jesus, using almost the identical words of the Publican. "Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy upon me. You would think those words from the blind man would have opened their hearts. But again the Apostles try to silence the blind man until Jesus commands that he be

brought to Him. When Jesus asked him what it was the blind man would have Jesus do, he humbly asks, "Lord, that I may receive my sight." His sight is restored and the Man follows Jesus, glorifying and praising Him.

The Apostles, like the Pharisee, found themselves too caught up in their own justification, busy with their own self importance., and in too much of a hurry to secure their own glory, that they despised the needs of the very people that Jesus had intended for them to serve.

Which brings us to the lesson that Jesus intends for us. You have heard me say that I preach the lessons I need to learn. This was a week where I was not coming to Christ with "Lord, have mercy on me a sinner," on my lips. I was self important, and quick to judge people unworthy of my patience, my understanding, my charitable duty. As I meditated on this lesson, I was reminded how easily and often I fall short of humility and kindness. I am coming through this lesson more aware that I need to work on this element of my Christian character.

I invite you to join me in the week to come to be more aware of our pridefulness and our judgmental inclinations. To see Christ in those people we are quick to judge and dismiss, because we are too involved with our daily busyness. These are the very people Jesus has brought into our lives so we would serve them rather than judge them.

Lord, have mercy upon me, a sinner.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.