

TRINITY 11

September 1 2019

Old Test: Genesis 4:1-15

Epistle: I Corinthians 15:1-10

Gospel: Luke 18:9-14

Standing...

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

The basis for today's sermon is our Gospel lesson—
that of two well-known sinners, who come before God to pray.
It's like Cain and Abel all over again.

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts be
acceptable in your sight, O Lord—our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Sitting...

Jesus' original audience were those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous,
and treated others, who were not like them, with contempt.

So, in their thinking—the thinking of the Pharisees...

their goodness,
their decency,
their works,
their self-discipline,
their piety,

made them better than anybody else,
which is why God accepted them.

No body can compete with us, they thought.

We're better, and God is pleased.

Jesus directs His parable to them.

He tells of two men who go to the Temple to pray—
taking their stand before God.

For one, it was a part of his daily routine.

You could set your watch by him.

Always on time.

And listen, forget the prejudice that Jesus' frequently stinging remarks

about Pharisees have formed in your mind.
 We have to give this particular Pharisee all the credit we can.
 He is after all, a good man.

If you were to choose one of these men to marry your daughter,
 you'd pick the Pharisee. Hands down.

It's the Pharisee you'd hire to work at your house,
 the Pharisee you'd try to get to join your church,
 the Pharisee you have over for dinner,
 ask to be the godparent of your child,
 and call in an emergency.

Listen again to what he prays,
*"God, I thank you that I am not like other men, (1) extortioners, (2) unjust, (3) adulterers,
 or (4) even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get."*

Fasts twice a week? None of us do that. We rarely give something up for Lent.
 Tithe *all* that we get? I doubt it. For most, God just get's the left overs.

This man's a role model for society.
 Can we sign him up for Vanco? He's good for it.
 Clearly, God hears this man's prayer.
 Because he's innocent, deserving to be heard.
 He's nothing at all like the other man.

Agghhh... The other man.

What a sell-out. A crook.
 He sold his soul a long time ago to the Roman occupiers—
 collecting from his fellow Jews all he could bleed out of them.
 All he has to do is pay the authorities an agreed upon flat fee,
 and anything above and beyond that, is money in the bank.
 To associate with him is treasonous.
 He's despicable.

But...there is something different about him.

Though he can't hold a candle to the Pharisee
 regarding outward righteousness or inward discipline, or religious piety,
 he recognizes that sin has pumped its poison through his veins and
 there was no breast to beat...but his own.

mia culpa, mia culpa, mia maxima culpa

Moreover, he stands far off—

probably in the shadows where he wouldn't be easily seen...

but he is seen—seen by God and seen by the Pharisee,
who makes his comparison.

And not even lifting his eyes to heaven...says,

"God be merciful to me a sinner," actually, "the sinner."

This man knows that his works,

no matter what they may be,

cannot justify him—ever.

He's guilty.

Thus, he stands terrified,

afflicted and ashamed—

hoping God doesn't give him what he deserves.

Jesus here is summing up all human beings into a single parable.

For all stand before God, either

trusting in themselves,

their own goodness and righteousness,

quick to point out their superiority over others.

Or, they come with empty hands of faith

with a burdened conscience, asking the Lord for mercy,

the forgiveness of their sins,

without thinking of anyone else.

You know, at different times in his life St. Paul was each one of these men.

He started out a Pharisee—just like the guy in the parable,

proud of his accomplishments,

denying his sinfulness,

claiming to be righteous before God,

and looking down on other people as the "real sinners."

"If we could just get rid of them."

But then God showed him how great a sinner he was.

The law shut up Paul's justifications and he was flayed.

Yet, God took pity upon him, humbled him,

and brought him to repentance and faith in Christ Jesus.

So, Paul went from being a Pharisee-kind-of sinner who stood condemned
before God to being the other kind of sinner—

a penitent, humbled sinner, justified by faith in Christ.

You know,

when I first started investigating the Lutheran distinctives,
and actually attending a Lutheran Church—I hated the Liturgy.

It didn't make sense to me,

because my whole life was used to being busy for God,
for being active before God—

this involved my praise, my devotion, my intensity...
and I took pride in it all.

It took time—study, and repentance, but I learned that the Liturgy
keeps us from acting like the Pharisee in Jesus' parable.

For example, when we attend a Divine Service,

we don't get tennis elbow patting ourselves on the back
by how good we are. We can't.

The Liturgy won't let us.

It's no accident that the Divine Service begins with each one of us as a lost cause—
where we confess...we are nature sinful and unclean,
sinning against You in thought, word, and deed...

In other words, I'm guilty.

We're throwing our lot in with the tax collector,
with nothing to give God but our sin and death.

But the Liturgy then leads us to something wonderful—absolution.

Where one hears, "I forgive you all of your sins."

The Liturgy leads you to confess,

"God be merciful to me, a sinner."

And what you hear is, "Peace be with you."

The Liturgy leads you to hear Christ's words,

"This is My Body and Blood

for your forgiveness."

And then you sing,

"Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world."

Then finally,

"May the LORD bless you and keep you."

And you go home justified.

Over and over, the Liturgy leads you to the most important gift of all—
the forgiveness of your sins,

turning you away from being the busy-body, prideful Pharisee

and into the tax collector who receives God's gifts passively,

whereby you readily acknowledge
you cannot justify yourself before God.

Then, you're pushed out into the world to do some good...for your neighbor.

These men—they arrive at the Temple at the evening sacrifice—for we read in Psalm 141:2, *"Let my prayer be counted as incense before you and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice."*

That means it's 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

At the evening sacrifice (just like the morning sacrifice)
a lamb was offered,
along with oil, grain and wine.

Huh—grain and wine—pointing to the Lord's Supper.
The Lord promised to be there
to meet with His people,
granting forgiveness, life and salvation.

These two men are at the Temple at this precise time.

The tax collector knows God is there—for He's promised to be,
yet he can't even look up.

He says, "God have mercy on me..."

However, instead of employing the typical term for mercy, *eleison*,
he used a different word altogether.

He uses a term fitting to the location.

Remember, this is within the Temple precinct.

The smoke of the sacrifice can be seen.

The tax collector prays,

"God, provide atonement for me, the sinner."

He's referring to the sacrifice.

He knows an innocent animal is losing its life in place
of guilty sinners, guilty sinners just like him, so that
God might turn His wrath away,
and instead show mercy.

The Pharisee is there at the same time.

And who does he pray about? Himself!

He points God to his works.

And just like Cain, in our OT lesson,
the Pharisee and his sacrifice are rejected.

Do you remember when Jesus cried, "It is finished?"

It was 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

He hung on the cross from 9 until 3.

Meaning He died when?

"...at the evening sacrifice."

The blood of all those sacrificial lambs were but a shadow
pointing to Christ.

Beloved, our Lord has heard you confess, "I am by nature sinful and unclean..."

And because of what He has done,

dying during the evening sacrifice,

you leave here today like the tax-collector, justified.

Which is what God does to you.

Righteous, with a righteousness not your own.

Holy, with a holiness not of your own.

And as your lips cry out for mercy that you have not merited
or deserved...Jesus pours upon your lips His own holy blood,
for the forgiveness of your sin.

Folks, this is how serious He is about saving sinners like us,
and keeping us in the faith all the days of our lives.

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

Standing...

And now may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and
minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.