



A SERMON BY THE REVEREND WILLIAM R. FLEMING  
*MARINERS' CHURCH OF DETROIT*

THE ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY  
AUGUST 16, 2015

THE PHARISEE STOOD AND PRAYED FOR HIMSELF. “GOD, I THANK YOU THAT I AM NOT AS OTHER MEN ARE,” AND THE PUBLICAN STANDING AFAR OFF WOULD NOT LIFT UP SO MUCH AS HIS EYES UNTO HEAVEN, SAYING “GOD BE MERCIFUL TO ME A SINNER.” LUKE WROTE “I TELL YOU, THIS PUBLICAN WENT DOWN TO HIS HOUSE JUSTIFIED RATHER THAN THE OTHER; FOR EVERYONE THAT EXALTED HIMSELF SHALL BE ABASED AND HE THAT HUMBLED HIMSELF SHALL BE EXALTED.”

IT IS RIGHT TO SAY THAT NEITHER THE PHARISEE OR THE TAX COLLECTOR WERE PERFECT PEOPLE. BOTH HAD FAILINGS, JUST LIKE US, BUT WE FOCUS ON THE PHARISEE WHO FELT HIMSELF A PERFECT PRESENTATION TO GOD.

HEAR THE WORDS FROM C.S.LEWIS:

“THE ESSENTIAL VICE, THE UTMOST EVIL, CAN BE PRIDE. IT WAS THROUGH PRIDE THAT THE DEVIL BECAME THE DEVIL. PRIDE LEADS TO EVERY OTHER VICE. IT IS REPRESENTATIVE OF THE COMPLETE ANTI-GOD STATE OF MIND. A PROUD MAN IS ALWAYS LOOKING DOWN ON THINGS AND PEOPLE. AND, OF COURSE, AS LONG AS YOU ARE LOOKING DOWN, YOU CANNOT SEE THAT GOD IS ABOVE US.” THE PHARISEE DID

NOT REALLY GO TO PRAY TO GOD, HE “PRAYED”, IF ONE CAN CALL IT SO, WITH HIMSELF.

WILLIAM BARCLAY’S COMMENTARY ON LUKE STATES:

THE DEVOUT OBSERVED THREE PRAYER TIMES DAILY—IN THE MORNING AND THE EVENING AND ALSO AT NOON. PRAYER WAS HELD TO BE SPECIALLY EFFICACIOUS IF IT WAS OFFERED IN THE TEMPLE AND SO AT THESE HOURS MANY WENT UP TO THE TEMPLE COURTS TO PRAY. JESUS TOLD OF TWO MEN WHO WENT. “THERE WAS A PHARISEE, HE DID NOT REALLY GO TO PRAY TO GOD. HE PRAYED ABOUT HIMSELF. TRUE PRAYER IS ALWAYS OFFERED TO GOD AND TO GOD ALONE.” A CERTAIN AMERICAN CYNICALLY DESCRIBED A PREACHER'S PRAYER AS "THE MOST ELOQUENT PRAYER EVER OFFERED TO A BOSTON AUDIENCE." THE PHARISEE WAS REALLY GIVING HIMSELF A TESTIMONIAL BEFORE GOD.

THERE IS A RECORDED PRAYER OF A CERTAIN RABBI WHICH RUNS LIKE THIS, "I THANK THEE, O LORD MY GOD, THAT THOU HAST PUT MY PART WITH THOSE WHO SIT IN THE ACADEMY, AND NOT WITH THOSE WHO SIT AT THE STREET CORNERS. FOR I RISE EARLY, AND THEY RISE EARLY. I RISE EARLY TO THE WORDS OF THE LAW, AND THEY TO VAIN THINGS. I LABOUR, AND THEY LABOUR. I LABOUR AND RECEIVE A REWARD, AND THEY LABOUR AND RECEIVE NO REWARD. I RUN, AND THEY RUN. I RUN TO THE LIFE OF THE WORLD TO COME, AND THEY TO THE PIT OF DESTRUCTION." IT IS ON RECORD THAT RABBI SIMEON BEN JOCAI ONCE SAID, "IF THERE ARE ONLY TWO RIGHTEOUS MEN IN THE WORLD, I AND MY SON ARE THESE TWO; IF THERE IS ONLY ONE, I AM HE!"

THE PHARISEE DID NOT REALLY GO TO PRAY; HE WENT TO INFORM GOD HOW GOOD HE WAS.

THIS PARABLE TELLS US CERTAIN THINGS ABOUT PRAYER.

(I) NO MAN WHO IS FULL OF SELF-PRIDE CAN TRULY PRAY. THE GATE OF HEAVEN IS SO LOW THAT NONE CAN ENTER IT SAVE UPON HIS KNEES.

(II) NO MAN WHO DESPISES OTHERS CAN PRAY. IN PRAYER WE DO NOT LIFT OURSELVES ABOVE OTHERS.

(III) TRUE PRAYER COMES FROM SETTING OUR LIVES BESIDE THE LIFE OF GOD. NO DOUBT WHAT THE PHARISEE SAID WAS TRUE. HE DID FAST; HE DID METICULOUSLY GIVE TITHES; HE WAS LIKE OTHER PEOPLE; STILL LESS WAS HE LIKE THAT TAX-COLLECTOR. BUT THE QUESTION IS NOT, "AM I AS GOOD AS MY NEIGHBOUR?" THE QUESTION IS, "AM I AS GOOD AS GOD?"

REUBEN ANDERSON SAID THIS:

“WHEN SOMEONE ASKED ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI WHY AND HOW HE COULD ACCOMPLISH SO MUCH, HE REPLIED; “THIS MAY BE WHY. THE LORD LOOKED DOWN FROM HEAVEN UPON THE EARTH AND SAID, ‘WHERE CAN I FIND THE WEAKEST, THE LITTLEST, THE POOREST MAN ON THE FACE OF THE EARTH?’ THEN HE SAW ME AND SAID, ‘NOW I’VE FOUND HIM, AND WILL WORK THROUGH HIM. HE WON’T BE PROUD OF IT. HE’LL SEE THAT I AM ONLY USING HIM BECAUSE OF HIS HUMBLE NATURE.”

THE PHARISEE IS SADLY MISSING THE POINT THAT GOD SHARES WITH US IN SO MANY WAYS. "A YOUNG MAN ONCE RECEIVED A MEDAL FROM AN ORGANIZATION WHICH USED VERY EXTRAVAGANT LANGUAGE IN EXTOLLING HIS ACCOMPLISHMENTS. JUBILANTLY THE PRIZE WINNER PROUDLY REPEATED THE WORDS TO HIS MOTHER. THEN HE ASKED, "HOW MANY GREAT MEN ARE THERE IN THE WORLD TODAY?" HIS MOTHER PONDERED FOR A WHILE AND THEN WISELY SAID, "ONE LESS THAN YOU THINK!"

ST. PETERS' WORDS..."HUMBLE YOURSELVES THEREFORE. UNDER THE MIGHTY HAND OF GOD. AS I HAVE GROWN OLDER I HAVE LEARNED HOW MUCH I DO NOT KNOW. I HAVE LEARNED THAT VIRTUALLY EVERY PERSON WHO PURPORTS TO BE AN AUTHORITY ON EVERYTHING IS PROJECTING A FALLACY ON HIMSELF AND OTHERS."

ALL OF US MUST BE ACTIVE AND GOOD LISTENERS. FIRST TO GOD, THEN TO OUR NEIGHBORS AND TO OURSELVES. TO DO OTHERWISE MEANS THAT HUMILITY HAS BEEN LOST AND WE HAVE NEGLECTED ONE OF GOD'S MOST IMPORTANT REQUIREMENTS.

GOD HAS TAUGHT US A LONG LESSON IN HUMILITY. HOW THEN DO WE PRACTICE REAL HUMILITY IN OUR LIVES? FIRST WE MUST UNDERSTAND ITS IMPORTANCE; PETER TELLS US THAT IT IS THE FORMOST GRACE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE. TRUE HUMILITY IS THE HIGHEST VIRTUE OF THEM ALL. BEING HUMBLE IS THEN A CORNERSTONE OF A SUCCESSFUL LIFE. SECONDLY WE MUST LISTEN TO OTHERS ACTIVELY. THIRDLY, WE MUST TAKE TIME TO READ, STUDY AND PRAY UPON OUR GOOD QUALITIES TO STRENGTHEN THEM AND OUR

NOT SO GOOD TRAITS, TO CHANGE THEM. WE SHOULD ASK OURSELVES, WHERE DOES HUMILITY FIT INTO MY LIFE AND DO I PRACTICE IT? IF WE DON'T, WE SHOULD ASK GOD FOR HELP IN DOING BETTER, FOR OUR GOD AND SAVIOUR ARE THE BEST EXAMPLES OF HUMILITY WE FOLLOW. BUT LET'S BE SURE TO UNDERSTAND THAT OUR HUMILITY IS NOT SERVILITY. HUMILITY IS NOT MEEKNESS. IT IS IN FACT A TRAIT THAT ALLOWS US TO COPE WITH THE DIFFICULTIES OF LIFE.

LUKE MADE IT CLEAR THAT JESUS WASN'T CRAZY ABOUT EITHER THE PHARISEE OR THE TAX COLLECTOR. BUT FOR OUR PURPOSES TODAY WE FOCUSED ON THE PHARISEE. THE GOSPEL ALONE TELLS US WHAT AN UGLY PATH IS IF WE WERE TO FOLLOW THE PHARISEE. BENJAMIN FRANKLIN SAID, "HE WHO FALLS IN LOVE WITH HIMSELF WILL HAVE NO RIVALS." ALL OF US MUST GROW AWAY FROM THE TRAITS WE HAVE HEARD FROM THE SELF RIGHTEOUS PHARISEE:

- 1) AN OVERHIGH OPINION OF ONESELF.
- 2) CONCEIT-AN EXAGGERATED SELF ESTEEM, HAUGHTINESS, ARROGANCE, KNOW-IT-ALL, OVERPRIDE IN ONESELF AND INSOLENCENCE.

WE HAVE HEARD AND LEARNED ABOUT THE HUMILITY WHICH OUR SAVIOUR HAS SHARED. JESUS WAS THAT MODEL OF HUMILITY. THINK ABOUT IT: OUR SAVIOUR EXUDED HUMILITY AND SO SHOULD WE.