

Australian Evangelical Lutheran Church
BETHLEHEM TOOWOOMBA, OUR SAVIOUR LOWOOD, ST JOHN'S AUBIGNY,
ST PAUL'S GREENWOOD, TRINITY MARBURG, TRINITY OAKY

23 October 2022

The 20th Sunday after Pentecost

HYMNS: 400 170 313 600

INTROIT:

Open Your ears to my words, O LORD! Pay attention to my groaning!
Listen carefully to the sound of my cry, my King, and my God! For I am praying to You.

O LORD, in the morning You will hear my voice. In the morning I shall set out my requests before You, and I shall wait expectantly.

For You are not a God who delights in wickedness. Nothing evil will dwell with You.

Arrogant people will not stand in Your sight. You hate all evildoers.
You will destroy those who tell lies. The LORD loathes the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.

However, because of Your great mercy I myself shall enter Your house. In fear of You, I shall bow down toward Your holy temple.

O LORD, lead me in Your righteousness because of my enemies! Make Your way level in front of me!

For nothing in their mouths is reliable. Their inward parts are ruin. Their throats are an open grave. They flatter with their tongues.

Hold them guilty, O God! Let them fall by their own counsels! Disperse them because of their many crimes! For they have been rebelling against You.

Nevertheless, let all who take refuge in You rejoice! Let them shout with joy for ever! May You shelter them, that those who love Your name may rejoice in You!

For You Yourself will bless the person who is righteous, O LORD. Like a shield You will surround him with Your favour.

God has spoken once. I have heard this twice, that power belongs to God, and that mercy belongs to You, O Lord. For You repay a person according to what he has done.

Psalm 5

COLLECT Almighty and everlasting God, You are always more ready to hear than we are to pray, and You are always ready to give more than we either desire or deserve. Pour down on us the abundance of Your mercy; forgive us those things of which our conscience is afraid; and give us those good things for which we are not worthy to ask for except by the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

READINGS:

Genesis 4:1-15 Cain and Abel.

2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18 Fight the good fight and keep the faith.

Luke 18:9-17 The tax-collector went home justified.

Genesis 4:1-15

¹ The man had relations with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, “I have acquired a man, the LORD.”

² Then she gave birth to his brother Abel. Abel was the shepherd of a flock of sheep, but Cain farmed the soil. ³ In the course of time, Cain brought some of what the ground produced as an offering to the LORD. ⁴ Abel also brought some first-born animals of his flock and some of their pieces of fat. The LORD looked favourably at Abel and his offering. ⁵ However, He did not look favourably at Cain and his offering. Cain became very angry and his face was downcast.

⁶ The LORD asked Cain: “Why are you angry and why has your face fallen?”

⁷ If you do right, will you not be accepted? However, if you do not do right, sin is crouching at the door. It longs to get you, but you should master it!”

⁸ Cain spoke to his brother Abel. However, while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

⁹ Then the LORD asked Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?”

He answered, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?”

¹⁰ He asked: “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s spilt blood is **crying out to Me** from the ground. ¹¹ Therefore, you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s spilt blood from your hand. ¹² When you work the ground, it will no longer yield you its produce. You will be a homeless wanderer on the earth.”

¹³ Cain told the LORD: “My punishment is greater than I can endure. ¹⁴ Look! Today You have driven me from the face of the ground, and I shall be hidden from Your presence.

I shall be a homeless wanderer on the earth, and anyone who finds me will kill me.”

¹⁵ However, the LORD told him, “Therefore, anyone who kills Cain will meet with sevenfold retribution.”

Then the LORD put a mark on Cain to keep anyone who found him from killing him.

2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18

⁶ For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race and have kept the faith. ⁸ For the future, there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing...

¹⁶ At my first defence no one supported me, but they all deserted me. May it not be reckoned against them! ¹⁷ However, the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, that the message might be fully proclaimed through me and all the Gentiles might hear it. **I was also delivered from the lion's mouth.**

¹⁸ The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed and save me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory for ever. Amen!

Luke 18:9-17

⁹ Jesus also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised everyone else: ¹⁰ “Two men went up to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other a tax-collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood and prayed this about himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: robbers, wrongdoers, adulterers or even like this tax-collector. ¹² I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all my income.’

¹³ However, the tax-collector, standing at a distance, did not even want to look up to heaven but kept beating his chest and saying, ‘God, be propitiated to me, the sinner!’ ¹⁴ I tell you, this man, rather than the other, went home justified. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

¹⁵ People were bringing even the infants to Jesus that He might touch them. When the disciples saw it, they began to rebuke them. ¹⁶ However, Jesus called the infants to Him and said, “Let the little children come to Me and do not forbid them! For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁷ Truly, I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will certainly not enter it.”

THE PH ARISEE AND THE TAX-COLLECTOR
Sermon for the 20th Sunday after Pentecost, 2022
Luke 18:9-14

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is the first part our Gospel from before, Luke 18:9-14, where Jesus tells the parable of the Pharisee and tax-collector: **Jesus also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised everyone else:** ¹⁰ **“Two men went up to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other a tax-collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood and prayed this about himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: robbers, wrong-doers, adulterers or even like this tax-collector. ¹² I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all my income.’ ¹³ However, the tax-collector, standing at a distance, did not even want to look up to heaven but kept beating his chest and saying, ‘God, be propitiated to me, the sinner!’ ¹⁴ I tell you, this man, rather than the other, went home justified. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Last Sunday we listened to Jesus as He taught about prayer, and that the continual prayer of the church is for *His return*. Today Jesus gives another parable about prayer, but it is quite different from the previous one. The parable before us today has to do with how we position ourselves before God. Listen again to Jesus’ words: **“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”** At first glance this sounds upside-down, but it’s true. There is a spiritual lesson to be learned from Jesus’ words, and we see this principle at work in the parable of “The Pharisee and the Tax-Collector.”

Jesus turns things *upside-down* from what people would expect in this parable. The Pharisee and the tax-collector: The one you would expect to be praised is instead portrayed as haughty and headed for a fall, while the one you would expect to be condemned is instead the one who goes home justified and will be exalted. Just upside-down from what you would expect.

The reason Jesus tells this parable is because His hearers needed to hear it. They are described as **“some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised everyone else.”** It’s this self-righteousness and the looking down on others that Jesus will rebuke.

So, Jesus begins this story. He says, **“Two men went up to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other a tax-collector.”** Right from the start you would expect the Pharisee to be the good guy and the tax-collector to be the bad guy. The Pharisees were widely regarded as the most moral, the most righteous, the most religious people in the community. In contrast, the tax-collectors were looked down upon as generally being corrupt, crooked, and disloyal to the nation. There was nothing much admirable about them, but there would be admirable things to say about the Pharisees, and this Pharisee did not need much prodding to say those admirable things about himself - even to God. The Pharisee is standing by himself there at the temple, and he prays like this: **“God, I thank You that I am not like other people: robbers, wrong-doers, adulterers or even like this tax-collector. ¹² I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all my income.”** This Pharisee is someone to whom his culture would look at and they would praise him. They would look up to him and see that he was not a blatant, obvious sinner that everybody could identify and look down upon. He was not, for example, a robber or wrongdoer, or an adulterer.

No, this Pharisee was not a blatant, obvious sinner like the tax-collector would be. Tax-collectors as a group were looked down upon, because they had the reputation for being corrupt and crooked, known for lining their own pockets. These Jewish tax-collectors were also hated because they were collecting taxes for the pagan Roman Empire; so they were seen as disloyal.

Tax-collectors made a convenient group for the Pharisees to compare themselves to and thus feel superior to.

So, the Pharisee in the parable was clearly not an outwardly manifest sinner. Rather, he was a pretty pious fellow. And the Pharisee would have you know that he was. After all, “**I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all my income**” he said. Well, that’s quite impressive. To fast, not just once or twice a year, but *twice a week* showed tremendous religious self-discipline! To give ten percent of everything you have as an offering to God – what wonderful sacrificial giving! Why, this Pharisee would be at the top of the list of pious people to be praised and imitated.

But Jesus turns all that upside down. Because this Pharisee was trusting in *these works of his* to make himself righteous before God, he didn’t think of himself as a sinner. That was out of the question. No, he thought he was superior to all those sinners who were not as good and righteous as he was. But in Jesus’ estimation, that is not praiseworthy. No, indeed, it is *deadly*. The Pharisee’s pride is what stands out in the way Jesus describes him, and it sets him in contrast to the next person Jesus tells us about, namely, the tax-collector.

The Pharisee stood by himself at the temple because he was so outstanding and superior to everyone else. The tax-collector, by way of contrast, stood at a distance, because he sensed his unworthiness to come before God. Out of shame, he would not even lift up his eyes to heaven. Rather than patting himself on the back, this man was beating his chest in contrition. Rather than listing a litany of why God should be pleased with him, the tax-collector simply says, “**God, be propitiated to me, the sinner!**” This tax-collector recognised his guilt before God and confessed it. He knew he was a sinner who did not delight in his sins; instead, he sorrowed over them. And the only thing he could think of to say is not to make any excuses, but simply to turn to God and seek His mercy. “**God, be propitiated to me, the sinner!**”

This is the prayer that Jesus praises. This is to let God be your righteousness. It is to recognise that you have no righteousness of your own to wave before God’s face. You are relying on what only God can provide:

a righteousness outside yourself that you have no right to, but you know God is merciful and offers to give it freely.

“**Be propitiated to me.**” But why? On what basis? If you are a sinner, and if God is a just judge, then must God not punish you for your sins, lest He be found to be slacking in His justice? *Yes*. So how in the world can God be merciful to you?

“**Be propitiated to me**” the tax-collector prays. The Greek word that’s used here is from the same root that’s used in Romans 3, where Paul says what God has done in order to be merciful to us. Paul writes that “*God has publicly displayed (Jesus) as the propitiatory-cover through faith in His blood*” (3:25).

A propitiation is an atonement sacrifice. It is a sacrifice that makes atonement for sins, covers them, so that they are not counted against you. And that happened at the temple on the Day of Atonement, when the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies and sprinkle the blood of the prescribed sacrifice on the Ark of the Covenant. He sprinkled it on the lid, the cover, which was called the mercy seat. And that sacrifice, Romans 3 says, was pointing ahead to the propitiation, the atoning sacrifice that Christ would make by *shedding His blood on the cross*.

That’s the connection with our parable today. When the tax-collector prays that God would be merciful to him, the basis for that mercy is that *Christ would “mercy-seat” him by making the atoning sacrifice for his sins*. And our sins too! We can pray to God to be propitiated to us, because Jesus “mercy-seated” us by His blood on the cross. Our sins are atoned for, fully forgiven, because of what Jesus has done for us. He is our righteousness.¹ Plead that before God and not your own goodness. Don’t be afraid to be a sinner. Don’t excuse any sins but confess them. Recognise yourself as a sinner in need of God’s mercy, and by His mercy you too will go to your house justified. To be justified is to be declared righteous by God, not guilty

¹ 1 Corinthians 1:30

before Him, because your punishment has already been served by Christ and His righteousness is credited to your account.

The Apostle John writes in his First Letter that *“If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us”* (1:8). That is true of all who think they have no need for Jesus, and instead look inwardly at themselves for their ticket to salvation. But there is a truth we can rely on, and John gives it as he continues in his Letter saying, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1:9). Why? Because the blood of Jesus, God’s Son, cleanses us from all sin. God has “mercy-seated” us in Christ.

“God, be propitiated to me, the sinner!” That was the tax-collector’s prayer. And it is our prayer too. And because God has been merciful to us, by sending Christ to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins, this is how we shall go down to our homes today justified, declared righteous, not with a righteousness of our own, but with the perfect righteousness of Christ. **“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”** Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Lord God, heavenly Father, You are our shelter and strength. You are always ready to help us, and never leave us. We praise You for the great mercy You have shown to us sinners in the gift of Your Son Jesus Christ. We glorify Him because He has come to remove our sins by His sacrifice on the cross, so that whoever believes in Him may not die but have eternal life. We praise You, O

Father, for Your great love to us, for rescuing us from the power of sin and death, and for opening to us the gate of heaven.

We confess that we are worthless sinners, guilty of flouting Your will more than we realise. We humbly repent of our evil, and trust for our forgiveness only in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Pardon us, and cleanse our lives for His sake. Grant that we may continue in Your kingdom as Your dear children.

Renew us by Your Spirit and teach us to love what is pure, holy, true, and good. Take captive our every thought, word, and deed, and make them obey Christ. Give us the desire to walk in Your ways, to follow Your Word, and to grow in it. Touch us with Your grace, that we may be transformed in character, firm in faith, joyful in hope, patient in troubles, and persistent in prayer. Fill our lives with the hope that Christ will transform our humble bodies and make them like His glorious body.

Fill Your Church with Your Spirit, that it may have a power and wisdom superior to all human knowledge. Give to all preachers and teachers the conviction and courage of true prophets, that Your people may be built up in faith and love, strengthened in service, and kept faithful to the end.

Spread Your truth and love among the nations, that they may receive Your truth in repentance and faith. Rescue them from error and godlessness, and move them to offer You true worship and praise. Bless our country. Help all to understand that personal advantage, public opinion, and party politics do not make a nation great, but obedience to Your will. Give us public servants and leaders in management and labour who are unselfish and far-sighted, and whose concern is for the public good and the God-given dignity of every person.

Be gracious to our homes. Give to all families the gifts of faith, love, and obedience to You, so that each home may be a first taste of the joy and blessedness of our heavenly home.

We pray you to heal and comfort all who face sickness, pain, hardship, suffering, or danger. Teach them to turn to You for help, and to trust in Your mercy. Give them hope and a joyous release from all their burdens.

These things we pray in the name of Jesus, our sure refuge and eternal hope. Amen.

Invisible Faith will have Visible Fruit

The book of Acts from beginning to end is a testimony to the power of the means of grace as the mark of the church. Where the gospel was preached, there was Christ, there was the Holy Spirit, and there the church was created and preserved. All of the epistles as well make the same point. Paul so often begins his epistles with an address to the believers, to the saints, in such and such a place. Just exactly who those saints were could not be known by one and by all. But the presence of the gospel guaranteed that there were believers in that place.

Accordingly, the visible church is the company of those who are gathered around the gospel. Where the gospel is, there the visible church will also be. Those who are members of the invisible church by faith will almost always be members also of the visible church. Again, that does not mean that all members of the visible church are likewise members of the invisible church. For it is faith in Christ as Saviour that makes one a member of the invisible church. That's an important point to keep in mind, lest one falsely imagine, as indeed so many do, that their seat in heaven is secure simply because they belong to a visible church. They make faith in the church a substitute for faith in Christ. Jesus warned against such a misplaced faith in the strongest possible terms. Consider the rich young man in Matthew 19:16-23. He was outwardly a member of the church, indeed a very good member. But inwardly he worshipped his wealth. Consider the two men who went up to the temple to pray in Luke 18:9-14, from our Gospel for today. Both were members of the visible church. But one, for all of his outward virtue, did not long for and receive forgiveness. Rather, he trusted in his own merits for his salvation. In John 8:31-47 Jesus confronted those Jews who trusted that their physical descent from Abraham and their outward connection with the people of God made them automatically heirs of the kingdom of heaven.

In so many of His parables about the kingdom of God Jesus warns against a false trust in mere outward association with the gospel, as though just being around the Word of God made one a child of God (e.g., Matthew 21:28-22:14; all of chapter 23; 25:1-30). To put it another way, membership by faith in Christ in the invisible church is what makes us want to belong also to the visible church; it's not membership in the visible church that makes us members of the invisible church, but just the other way around.

It is

sad but true that even among those who appear to be the best members of the church, even among pastors and teachers of the church, there are those who are not members of the invisible church. They either are hypocrites or teachers so false in their teaching that they deny the essential elements of the gospel by which alone faith is created and sustained. And so Jesus warns us all to be on our guard against both hypocrisy and faith-denying, faith-killing false doctrine. He could not have said it more clearly or more powerfully than he did in Matthew 7:21-23: *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord!’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father, who is in heaven.”* ²² *Many will ask Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, in Your name driven out demons, and in Your name performed many miracles?’* ²³ *Then I shall tell them frankly, ‘I never knew you. Depart from Me, you who do what is evil!’”*

Precisely because it is possible for people to deceive themselves into thinking that they are members of the invisible church simply because of their outward connection to the visible church body, Peter joins in Jesus’ warning against becoming mere mouth-Christians who are devoid of any of the fruits of faith. Such a one, Peter says, *“is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure”* (2 Peter 1:9-10). The only way to do that is to remain constant in repentance, which confesses our always-absolute need for our Saviour and then in faith trusts in Jesus’ perfect life and substitutionary death in payment for our sins. Such a faith will seek to give evidence of its presence in the exercise of a Christian life, in a struggle against sin, and in a devotion to sound doctrine drawn from the Word of God.

To put it another way, the invisible faith will have visible fruit. The appearance of fruit alone does not make one a member of the invisible church; that membership is by faith alone-visible fruit in the hypocrite or the self-deceived is rotten to the core, even though the core cannot be seen, no matter how good it looks on the outside. Nevertheless, it is at the same time true and important that true faith will produce true fruits of faith. Their quality and number may vary, but fruit there will always be.

Sunday, 6 November. Members below the Range will be holding their annual Children's Sunday School picnic at Marburg. ALL CHILDREN from the parish are invited to come along (actually, everyone is invited!). For members on the Downs, if you plan on coming along, please let pastor know ASAP. We usually hold a BBQ and need to know a rough idea of numbers for catering. Also, if any Downs congregations decide to cancel their LR service to instead attend Marburg HC on the day, please tell Pastor.

COMING SERVICES

| 30 October Reformation Day | 6 November All Saints' Day | 13 November 23 Pentecost |
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| 10.00am TMBA HC AELC Service | 8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA LR 9.00am GRN LR 9.30am AUB LR 9.00am MARBURG HC & Sunday School picnic | 8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA LR 9.00am GRN LR 9.30am AUB LR 9.00am LOWOOD LR (Pastor away for the weekend) |
| Sunday, 30 October | | |
| READINGS: Revelation 14:6-7; | Romans 3:19-28; | John 8:31-36 |
| HYMNS: 500 195 271 188 287 208 | | |
| Sunday, 6 November | | |
| READINGS: Revelation 7:2-17; | 1 John 3:1-3; | Matthew 5:1-12 |
| HYMNS: 501 213 392 (489 285) 497 | | |

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Today, 12.30pm. Choir practice at Toowoomba.

OCTOBER BIBLE STUDIES:

Thursday the 27th, 10.00am at Lowood.

Friday the 28th, 7.30pm at Oakey. (Oakey/Aubigny combined)

Sunday, 20 November.

9.30am AELC HC service at Bethlehem Toowoomba.

Shared lunch and fellowship after service followed by a concert beginning at 12.30pm.