

October 23,2020

Luke 18:9-14

“Marching Orders: Get Over Yourself”

Today we begin a sermon series entitled, “**Marching Orders.**” Each week our texts will focus on something *we can do* to live the life of faith...we will be getting our “marching orders.” Today we have one of the many stories Jesus told which we long ago decided we knew and have stopped listening to it.

We live in a culture ***soaked in psycho-babel.*** Even if you don’t recognize my label – you know what I mean. We throw around words from psychology and sociology as if we knew what they meant. “She is so stuck on herself!” has been upgraded lately to “He is so self-absorbed!” or at the peak of exasperation these days *the term of choice* has become, “*Narcissistic.*” Don’t get me wrong – it isn’t that such things don’t exist. It is that *most of us* are not qualified to diagnose it.

Our text today is marked by just this problem – *the inability to understand what we are looking at and how to diagnose it.* Unlike many stories in the New Testament, we are given extremely clear information on *who the story was told for and what it means.* You would think this would keep us from going off the main path while reading it...oh, if only.

We are told Jesus tells this story to *those who justified themselves and despised others.* That seems clear. And the two main characters are as obvious as anyone could have imagined – *a righteous Pharisee and a sinning Tax collector.* The scene of their encounter is the Temple – and this appears to be a home court advantage for the Pharisee.

As the story unfolds listen to the prayers of each: “*I thank you God I am not like others who do terrible things...*” followed by “*Lord have mercy on me, a sinner.*” No surprises here – each person has accurately described their character.

And then the whole thing is turned on its head and Jesus says, “*The sinner went home having received the mercy of God.*” It is jarring- or at least it should be. We have been so conditioned that Tax collectors aren’t so bad, and Pharisees are awful that it is hard for us to feel the earth-shattering nature of Jesus

pronouncement. A pronouncement which neither baptizes bad behavior nor discounts positive choices.

The Achilles heel of this passage is that Jesus has been heard saying – “People who make decisions based on religious conviction are so much worse than people who play the system of this world for profit no matter who they hurt.” Which isn’t at all what Jesus tells us. He knows full well the tax collector does things not pleasing to God and the Pharisee does honorable religious practices.

The important difference between them is **not** that one is good, and one is bad. The difference is that one of them knows their *only hope is God’s mercy* and the other believes he has *earned God’s good will*. One asks for what only God can give and the other assumes he has God in the bag. The next time we think we have God in the bag, remember – God won’t fit.

Some hear Jesus telling us we will all be fine as long as we feel bad about ourselves. “*Oh, you know, God would love you – but you just have too much self-confidence!*” Friends, we get over ourselves...*not by trashing ourselves but by glorifying God*. Not by imagining there is *no hope* for us but by knowing there is *always hope* when it is placed in God who loves us. The Pharisee doesn’t fail by doing good things – but by assuming he has no need for mercy because he has made good choices. There is room to feel good about positive choices – for the Pharisee and for us. Where we have to part company is imagining our *holy pursuit of living as God’s children* makes us better than other people or somehow obligates God. As recipients of unearned grace – we pass grace to others.

Humans spend a lot of time *comparing ourselves one to another*. It is a failed way of determining value. Instead, we find wholeness when life is not about us and how we compare with others *but about God who loves and leads always*. What we do matters. Getting over ourselves doesn’t mean *giving up* on life – but *engaging life as God’s children* – trusting God without imagining God has been obligated. Serving God knowing *all comparisons ultimately fail*. Let’s get over ourselves by getting better and better at glorifying God.