

“Exalted Humility”

Luke 18:9-14

He (Jesus) also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt:

“Two people went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’

But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’

I tell you, this person went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Exalted Humility

Luke 18:9-14

October 26, 2025

Rev. Michael P. Catanzaro

I.

This week and last we have heard Jim and Patrick talk about Stewardship, as the season of giving is upon us. Continuing the theme, today is the occasion of the “Dreaded Stewardship Sermon.” Which means that next week is Pledge Sunday, always the first Sunday in November. In advance of this, we will be mailing out a Stewardship letter, a brochure we’ve crafted called “*What Is Stewardship? Straight Answers To Common Questions*,” Jim’s poem from last week and, finally, a pledge card. In an effort to reach everyone we will be sending individual mailings to folks, as well as including the Pledge Card with the November newsletter. We ask that you prayerfully consider what you might offer the church this coming year in terms of time, talents and treasure.

II.

Now, if you are newer to the church, you will be relieved to know we take a pretty soft sell approach to stewardship. No one will be knocking on your door, and no one from Session will be trying to corner you at coffee hour (so feel free to go to up and have a munch). We feel very strongly here on the Park that, first and foremost, we are here to support *you* in *your* life and in *your* spiritual journey. Do we want and need everyone’s support to make this church happen? Yes. Absolutely. However, your support of the church should be a response to the *church* first supporting *you*. We also feel very strongly that our stewardship campaign runs all year long in the worship, care, education, mission, and fellowship which we provide, freely and joyously, to any who would receive it.

III.

However, as will be the case over the next few weeks, the economic wheel has to hit the reality of the road. Bills must get paid, buildings maintained, and staff compensated. So every year at this time, we ask folks not to *pay up* but, rather, to *buy in* to what we’re trying to do here on the Park...and heavens to Betsy we do an awful lot.

Nevertheless, the *most* important part of our yearly Stewardship Campaign is to simply say thank you for all that each of you do every day, all year long, for our church and, through it, for our community and this world. So on behalf of myself and Linda whom you clothe, feed, and shelter, on behalf of our staff (Patience, Andrea, Christy, Mark, Pastor Donna, Emily, Kate and Cameron) and on behalf of all the lives you touch through the worship, counseling, outreach, education and fellowship you provide...I say THANK YOU!

IV.

The lectionary reading today from Luke's Gospel is a familiar one: the pious Pharisee and the sinful tax collector went up to the temple to pray. The pious Pharisee offers a prayer of thanksgiving so delighted is he not to be like those around him, sinners all: thieves, rogues, adulterers, and *especially*, tax collectors. Like the one who just happens to be standing right next to him.

In contrast to this, the tax collector well aware of his own sinfulness, does no such boasting about how much *he* gives but, rather, makes a simple offering of prayer. A petition asking for mercy which arises out of his own necessity. At the end of the parable Jesus says it is the *tax collector* who went home justified, and concludes with these words for the listener: "*All who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.*"

V.

Today I would like to speak to you about "exalted humility." Not a phrase you hear very much and one, I suspect, most of us would be hard-pressed to define until we actually experience it in real life. But brothers and sisters, we have experienced it.

If we look at this passage what we see is a pharisee and a tax collector going up to the temple (church) to pray. What we *don't* see, but certainly can imagine, are the folks at the temple (church) watching the whole situation unfold. Certainly these two were not the only people praying and worshiping there that day. We can also be equally certain there must have been a priest (pastor) in attendance as well. So, if we were to put ourselves into the shoes of these unmentioned witnesses, what would we feel and think about such an interaction?

VI.

Given that it is Stewardship time I am compelled to be honest and say to you it *would* be nice to have a few arrogant, boastful, smug, and self-righteous folks here in the congregation to give a tenth of their income to the church. As a minister, I could put up with that (and I know more than a few ministers who do). Bill paying at the end of the month would not be such a sweat, and perhaps we would even have a little *extra* money to do some cool things.

Alas, this is not the case here on the Park. *Oh no*, mostly what we have *here* are (mostly) regular, hard-working, paycheck to paycheck, fixed income folk earnestly endeavoring to raise families, care for each other, and bring some measure of God's grace to this world. People who humble me with their faith in our church (and in me), and the time, energy, and resources they freely and joyously offer to God *through* this church each and every year. People who know full well the meaning of the words: "*God, be merciful to me, a sinner.*"

VII.

When I was kid, I thought being a sinner meant you were a bad person. As I got older and started to see the theology behind the term I never liked it all that much. It seemed to me to be a cruel word used by those with a stunning lack of compassion. Now that I'm a bit older, I find great comfort in the word, and a kinship with those who chose to use it as a way to understand themselves. As people who do not always get it right, who have suffered and been brought low and who, quite honestly, could use some support to just get through their days and contend with what life, and God, is asking of them.

In this regard, I find solace and feel blessed to stand here each Sunday with sinners just like me. Folks who are honest with themselves about their need for grace, willing to share the grace they have received, and committed to living and working together as a community founded upon that grace.

VIII.

People, from here on out we are in this life together. We live in a day and age when most of our family and many of our oldest friends live far from us. We know a few people on our street, a few from work, perhaps the parents of our kid's friends, and a few more from other areas in our lives. However, the

people sitting beside you here in this sanctuary, those worshipping with you online, and those who read the sermons each week, we are your *church*, and we are the most immediate and effect community of support you will have for the rest of your life. The real pledge of support you are being asked to make today, and every day, isn't one written on a pledge card with a dollar sign before it. Instead, it is a a promise etched upon one's heart to love rather than judge, to lift up rather than tear down, and to share the load rather than shirk it until death do us part.

IX.

Although this is a somewhat sobering truth, each of us should take real comfort in the promise of this church and the fidelity of this congregation. We are building something here on the Park which is both incredible, and incredibly real. From physical changes to increased membership and mission, to a growth in vitality, through God's mercy this church is improving and deepening each and every year. In many small ways, and in the occasional big way, we are bringing about the kingdom of God here on earth.

Do not miss that fact, and do not miss the realization that through God's help we sinners have been given the rare opportunity to create something lasting and truly decent in this world so often filled with woe. No small part of it our own. So, take heart fellow sinners, in our humility God is exalting us, and through this church, God will support *you*. Amen.