



Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost (C)
St. Mark's Episcopal Church
October 27, 2019
The Rev. Dr. Christian Brocato, Rector

†May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Strength and Redeemer. Amen.

In the Gospel, did you hear the Pharisee throw the tax collector ‘under the bus’? Both men, walking to the Jerusalem Temple with a similar intention and goal, to pray. Though “standing by himself”, the Pharisee prayed, “God, I thank you that I’m not like other people... even like this tax collector.”

As I pondered this Gospel passage last week, what came to mind was the potential of that statement to be one from a heart of ‘bullying’. On one level, the Pharisee’s language could be categorized as bullying. As I pondered the news in the nation’s capital last week, what came to mind was ‘bullying’. As I pondered recent racially charged words tossed to and fro, what came to mind was ‘racial bullying’.

Research tells us that there are numerous forms of bullying: “Physical Bullying; Verbal Bullying; Emotional Intimidation; Racist Bullying; Sexual Bullying and Cyberbullying”. There could be others as well. “Racist Bullying can take many forms such as making racial slurs, spray painting graffiti, mocking the victim’s cultural customs and making offensive gestures.” <https://www.stompoutbullying.org/get-help/about-bullying-and-cyberbullying/forms-bullying> Bullying can and most often does have long-range affects.

Just a couple of weeks ago, Temple Emanuel on Fulton was the unfortunate recipient of racial bullying when anti-Semitic graffiti was discovered on a Sunday morning. Even with an intense security program, hurtful and disturbing graffiti happened. I contact Rabbi Shadick with our support of his congregation.

Two summers ago, a young man ripped down the Parish’s rainbow banner containing the words “God is love” from the Parish House balcony. He entered the church and shouted anti-gay slurs in the middle of the 10:30 Eucharist. Hurtful and disturbing words from someone unknown to us. Who knows what he expected to accomplish!

The Gospel parable paints an outcome perhaps different from what the Pharisee expected. The Pharisee seemed quite smug in doing what he considered to be the right things in life. Was he expecting praise?

On the other hand, the tax collector, considered a ‘bad guy and puppet of Roman tax collecting’ asked for forgiveness. Jesus exonerates the tax collector with language now familiar to some of us: “All who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Imagine the affect that statement might have had on the Pharisee? Imagine the affect the statement might have on those who today think that they are above the law or above moral and ethical behavior without consequence?

These days, we find ourselves in complex and confusing times, and yet, the Gospel of Jesus is as timely today as it was two thousand years ago. Jesus, the love of God in the world, confronted the reality of social and political injustices of his time and challenges us to do the same.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to be like him. We are called to walk in his footsteps. We are called to live in the world as he would have us live and *be* people of justice, mercy and love. And, we are called to “walk humbly humble before God”. (Micah 6:8)

We are challenged to recognize the dark places in our lives, be honest with ourselves, ask for forgiveness and be grateful for the forgiveness and reconciliation offered to us through Jesus. Forgiveness and reconciliation can be healing, healing which is offered to us through the loving hands of Jesus. Are there relationships in your life that need healing, a healing which Jesus exemplified during his life and ministry?

An active ministry at St. Mark’s which seeks healing in the world is Dismantling Racism. The Dismantling Racism pledge crafted by the Ministry and published for the past two weeks was approved by the Vestry. It is a pledge in response to our Bishop’s charge to respond to the growing racism of our time and to confront it.

In a few minutes, we will be asked to take the pledge. No one is mandated to take the pledge, just as no one is mandated to recite the words of the Nicene Creed. I encourage all of us to recognize the evil of racism and its many forms and voice a public response to end it. In truth, we can only do that if we are humble before God and recognize the destructive nature of racism.

Being humble before God and our neighbors is not an easy task. It wasn’t an easy task for the Pharisees, an elite class of the Hebrew people. Jesus challenged them to reform their lives and challenges us to reform our lives and respect the dignity of all people as children of God.

In today’s second reading, Paul encourages us to ‘fight the good fight’, to ‘finish the race’ and to ‘keep the faith’. We might add to those dictums, ‘let our light shine’ so that the world will know us by our love. That love rejects darkness and shines forth the light of Christ. When we work to love as Jesus loved and continues to love through the power of the Spirit, we are one with the love of God in Jesus. To love as Jesus loves means to be committed to him and the mission to which we are called as *his* church.

As part of our mission, the last of the Stewardship letters was mailed at the end of last week. The envelope contains the letter as well as the pledge card and proportional giving chart. The mailing asks all of us to share our financial resources and offer to God as an expression of the love we have for God and for work we do together at St. Mark’s.

Here though certainly imperfectly, we strive to offer a sign of our lives and our labors. We work together, so that we and others might experience the love of Jesus through our ministry. Here, we learn how to be humble before God, so that the work of the Spirit can make of us who God calls us to be as followers of Jesus.

As his disciples, we are called to offer our minds and hearts, so that we might experience a change of heart. The tax collector experienced a change of heart and was given a great gift. Who knows just how his life was changed!

How is your life today, your heart today? Is your heart in need of healing and change?

May we open ourselves to the love of God in Jesus and experience a new heart. Let us embrace the love which is ours in Jesus. That love can enable us to be healed, to fight the good fight, to win the race and to change the world in which we live. Amen.