

Wednesday, February 18, 2015

Written by Dr. Helen Blier, director of continuing education, and brought to you by the Continuing Education Office at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

## Scripture

Luke 18:9-14

9 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: 10 “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 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. 12 I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’ 13 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!’ 14 I tell you, this man 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.”

## Devotional

It’s hard to read anything in Luke’s account of the Good News without risking a sense of social vertigo; the accepted order of things has been flipped upside down. Business as usual has been suspended in favor of a glimpse of God’s reign. Animals bear witness first to the incarnation. Samaritans become social workers. And... a tax collector surpasses a Pharisee on the holy-meter? How utterly shocking and scandalous!

The repentant pause we are called to during this purple season is more than just an internal audit of personal responsibility. Rather, Lent underscores what Luke’s gospel challenges us to do in what the tax collector practices in particular. He repents. It is not just for personal behavior, but for participation in a way of life organized around taking advantage of people. Not just him but the system, too. Now, I’m sure he had a family to feed, kids who needed to go to college, maybe payments to make on the family donkey. Don’t we all? And it’s not like he *created* the system or even *wanted* to take advantage of people day in, day out. After all, we all have to make a living, don’t we?

Don’t we?

There’s the rub. We are called to repent even if we just participate in (and benefit from) unjust systems that we did not create. We aren’t let off the hook. Echoing the prophets who came before him, Jesus reminds us again of our call to act kindly, love justice, and walk humbly with God. Friends, we’ve got a long road ahead of us.

## Prayer

God, help us remember. Help us remember the dangers of self-righteousness, the myth of privilege earned, the brokenness of a world in which people are still oppressed. And help us remember your call to act kindly, live justly, and walk humbly with you. Without any of this, our worship is hollow and our lives meaningless. We ask this in the name of your crucified Son. Amen.