

## Lenten Devotional February 14, 2024 (Ash Wednesday)

### 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."*

### Devotion

#### The Rev. Carolyn Cranston '99, Director of Alumnae/i and Church Relations

A thumb covered in ashes presses against your forehead, making the sign of the cross, while your pastor says, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." On this Ash Wednesday, as we begin the Lenten season, it is once again time to remind ourselves of our mortality and our sinful natures.

The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector is a vivid example of the grace that God extends to us, despite our penchant to sin. The Pharisee went up to the temple to pray, giving thanks to God because he knows he is better than those who sin. He is righteous and spouts off about achieving all the things that are required of him. When he finishes his prayer, he is the same person that he was when he started. He is still righteous; perhaps we would call it self-righteous.

The tax collector, aware of his sinful nature, could not even gaze up to the heavens. He sees himself as wretched. He shows humility, but it goes deeper than that. The contrite tax collector empties himself, pours himself out before God and asks for mercy. He offers God nothing. He has no good deeds to recount. The tax collector trusts God to provide what he needs. He heads home justified.

God knows our hearts. When we surrender to God and accept that God is in control, our lives are changed. God loves us, claims us as God's own, and helps us live into our potential. We too will go home justified before God, by grace, through our faith in Jesus the Christ.

"You see, a potter can only mold the clay when it lies completely in his hand. It requires complete surrender." - Corrie Ten Boom

### Prayer

Holy and all-knowing God, we give you thanks for the many ways that you bless us, even in our imperfection. Teach us, in all humility, to surrender ourselves completely to you—heart, mind, and strength. Then, Lord, mold and shape us to be the persons that you created us to be, a new creation in Christ. In Jesus' name, Amen.