

Lenten Devotional February 14, 2018

Scripture

Luke 18:9-14

⁹He 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. ¹¹The 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. ¹²I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’ ¹³But 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!’ ¹⁴I 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

The Rev. Mark Tidd, Interim Pastor, Little Falls Presbyterian Church, Arlington, Va. / Doctor of Ministry Reformed Focus

Jesus directs his words to unnamed listeners who were far from what the prophet Micah said the Lord expected: “to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). The fasting and tithing of the Pharisee in the parable was contradicted by his arrogance, whereas the tax collector felt profoundly his deep need for God. While it’s obvious who our model should be, it can perhaps be tempting to reassure ourselves that we are not like “those Pharisees”—and perhaps to take just a little pride in our humility.

Then comes Ash Lenten Devotional and with it the words of the liturgy: “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return; repent, and believe in the gospel.” We have the obligation and the opportunity to confess our sinfulness and to cry with the tax collector, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” We receive the cross-shaped mark of ashes on our foreheads as an intimate sign that all we can do is accept our dependence on the mercy of God. And we just might recognize that the mercy of God is enough, and is reason enough for deep thanksgiving and joy.

May we give thanks to God on this Ash Wednesday and throughout Lent for the mercy shown to us in Jesus as we prepare our hearts to observe the shattering goodness of Good Friday and the astounding goodness of Easter.

Prayer

God of grace and mercy, grant us the true humility that abandons pretense about our own righteousness. Enable us to repent truly and to believe your Good News with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. Amen.