

October 23, 2022  
Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost  
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH  
Pastor Joel Sutton

Luke 18:9-17 (Genesis 4:1-15; 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18)

## TRUE HYPOCRITES AND TRUE SAINTS.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

Our text for meditation today comes from the Gospel according to St Luke, the 18th chapter which you heard read earlier.

There are two types of people in the world. There are *Cains* and there are *Abels*. There are *Pharisees* and there are *tax collectors*. There are *true hypocrites* and there are *true saints*. The *true hypocrites* are *spiritually dead*, and the *true saints* were *once dead* but have been *made alive*. One declares *themselves* to be righteous and the other is declared righteous *by God*.

You cannot tell the two types apart by looking at outward appearances. They have no distinguishing marks. And you cannot necessarily tell them apart their actions. There is only *one thing* that separates the one type from the other – and that is simple *faith and trust* in God. *Faith* is the difference between all who are members of the kingdom of the devil and eternally condemned – and those who are members of the Kingdom of God and are eternally saved.

Cain and Abel look alike. (cf: Genesis 4:1–15) Because of their parent’s sin the Garden, like you and me and all mankind, both are born in the inward sinful image of Adam. Both men were likely taught the promise of God in the Garden to send a Savior to crush the head of the serpent. (cf: Genesis 3:15) Both look alike in worship, each bringing an offering appropriate to their occupation.

Much has been made over why the Lord had no regard for Cain’s offering but had regard for Abel’s. Scripture does not give an explicit reason – but it does imply that the problem is internal, a personal attitude known only to God. The writer to the Hebrews records that:

***“By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.”*** (Hebrews 11:4)

God alone can see into the heart. Abel had *faith and trust in God* which made his offering acceptable; whereas, Cain had faith and trust in himself, making his offering unacceptable. (cf: LW 1, 259; “*Primogeniture*,” Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible, 1764) Do not be confused or deceived. Faith is not knowing that God merely exists. Faith trusts in God alone, clinging to His promises of mercy, forgiveness, and salvation. Cain knew God existed but trusted in himself. Even though He lived for many more years, he was already dead, spiritually dead, belonging to the kingdom of the devil. (cf: 1 John 3:12) On the other hand, although Abel’s life was cut short,

he is still alive today in the Kingdom of God which has no end. Even though he died a physical, through his faith he still speaks today along with the great cloud of witnesses who have gone on to heaven. (cf: Hebrews 12:1)

In our Gospel today, Jesus tells a parable about the two types of people, those who are *spiritually dead* and those who were *once dead* and have now been *made alive*. (cf: Luke 18:9-17) Like Cain, some trust in themselves and their own righteousness. Like Cain did to Abel, they treat others with contempt. Like Abel, others trust in God.

It is a parable about the two extremes in Judaism: one man represents the holiest of the holy people, and the other represents everything sinful and evil in the world. Those listening to Jesus thought it obvious which man was a child of God by faith and which was child of the devil and unbelief. But appearances are not always as they seem.

Look at the Pharisee. [sarcasm on →] He has to be a true saint – right? [← sarcasm off] He is a respected member of Jewish society, a scholar in the Law of Moses and traditions of man that have been handed down through the generations. He has no outward grievous sins. He is the one who gives big offerings at church. But the problem is – He does not pray for forgiveness of sins because he believes he is sinless. He does not ask God for increased faith because he has perfect faith in himself. When he calls out to God in thanksgiving – he is not thanking God for the gifts he has received – but giving thanks to God for himself. He boasts that he is not like all the other men in the world.

Jesus presents the Pharisee as an example of the greatest amount of righteousness that the natural man can attain by his own power and free will. Now, if your righteousness meets or exceeds the righteousness of this Pharisee, congratulations. You have made a god of yourself. You have justified yourself. You will go home secure and condemned in your sin.

Unfortunately, like the Pharisee, you and I look around and thank God that we are not like other people. Of course, you are not an adulterer or in a same sex relationship. You are neither racist, nor slanderous toward those who oppose your political position. But you and I are just better at hiding our sin than our neighbors.

And what about contempt? Cain had contempt for Abel. The Pharisee had contempt for the tax collector. Tell me about how it feels when that neighbor you do not care for is suffering or their sins are finally exposed and they reap what they have sown. [sarcasm on →] You think: “*Yeah, it is about time ol’ Charlie suffered hard times, isn’t it?*” [← sarcasm off] Yet, when you suffer temporal punishment like Cain, you cry out to God that your punishment is more than you can bear. (cf: Genesis 4:13) You sit smug trusting in the hours that you volunteer and the dollars you give to the poor and hungry and to the church – but the fact remains – when you and I honestly examine ourselves against God’s Commandments, we are exposed as self-righteous Pharisees.

A tax collector also came to the busy temple courts to pray. By all appearances he was among the unbelieving spiritually dead. In those days tax collectors were social and religious outcasts. Many were dishonest. They worked on behalf of the Gentile Romans, so they

were despised as much as lepers and prostitutes. Yet, in the parable, the tax collector represents all who by faith, humbly trust in God to save them from their sins.

Unlike the Pharisee, the tax collector feels the grief and shame of his sin and stands far off at a distance. (cf: Luke 18:13) He does not compare himself with others, but comes as an unworthy sinner calling upon the holy and righteous God, knowing he deserves nothing but God's wrath and punishment. He cannot even lift his eyes toward heaven, but in humble contrition and repentance, he only beats his chest as a sign of his unworthiness. With childlike faith in the gracious God, he prays:

***"God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"*** (Luke 18:13)

Appearances are not always as they seem. God alone can see into the heart. Jesus reveals God's verdict on each of these two men, and it is just the opposite of what the crowd there before Him would have expected. He says:

***"<sup>14</sup> I tell you, this man [the tax collector] went down to his house justified, rather than the other."*** (Luke 18:14)

The tax collector has life-saving faith in our patient and merciful God. It was not faith by his own reason or strength, but faith through the Word of God. Scripture does not say when he came to faith, and it does not really matter. Somewhere in his travels, someone told Him that God is merciful and gracious to all those who confess their sins. What matters is he called upon the Name of the Lord in faith. St Paul writes:

***"... [the] Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. <sup>13</sup> For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*** (Romans 10:12–13)

In his first epistle, St John writes:

***"<sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*** (1 John 1:9)

To be sure, the Pharisee's works and deeds were not sinful in themselves. His sin was that he trusted only in himself and treated others with contempt. He did not recognize that he had been born in sin and needed a Savior. He exalted himself and went home self-justified, secure and condemned in his sins. Unless he later would come to faith in Jesus, on the last Day he will be humbled to eternal damnation.

The tax collector, on the other hand, humbled himself before the Lord. He had faith that God is merciful and gracious to poor and condemned sinners. He went home exalted. He went home justified and declared righteous in God's sight.

In our text, Jesus goes on to teach that all who humbly trust the Lord with childlike faith, no matter what their age or status – even little infants – belong to the Kingdom of God. You witness that humility every time you witness a baptism. Before you were baptized, you were a true hypocrite, one who was spiritually dead. But in the washing of the water and God's Word, you were united to Jesus' death and made alive in Christ. (cf: Romans 6:3–4; Colossians 2:13–15)

Just as any child may inherit their parent's blessings and property, you have inherited God's Kingdom: specifically, forgiveness of sins, faith, life, and salvation. You are a new creation. The

old has passed away. Behold! The new has come. (cf: 2 Corinthians 5:12) It is no longer you who live, but Christ who lives in you. (cf: Galatians 2:20)

The tax collector went down to his house justified. But that does not mean he could continue living a sinful life. No. All who were once dead but now alive in Christ must daily fight against the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh. Begin your day by remembering your Baptism. St Paul writes, in Baptism:

***"... you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."*** (Romans 6:11)

After Jesus healed the invalid at the pool on the Sabbath Jesus told Him:

***"See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you."*** (John 5:14)

When the scribes and Pharisees brought the woman who was caught in adultery to Jesus to test Him, Jesus exposed their hypocrisy, causing them to slink away, leaving the woman unpunished. Jesus told her:

***"Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more."*** (John 8:8–11)

Brothers and sisters in Christ, almighty God, your heavenly Father, has had mercy upon you and has given His only Son to die for you and for His sake forgives you all our sins: your sins of self-righteous pride, hypocritical faith, contempt for your neighbor, and failure to perform the works and deeds that God has prepared for you in advance. (cf: Ephesians 2:10) Like Abel, cling to your God given faith. Trust in Jesus' promises of mercy, forgiveness, and salvation. Like the tax collector, by faith in Jesus' promises, you go home justified. As you go – sin no more.

A good tree continues to bloom and bear good fruit. No one commands it to do so. It does so by nature. If your faith is true, it will bear fruits of righteousness. Our Lord God has given you good works to perform so that you do not lose sight of what He has given you. Jesus told His disciples:

***"<sup>16</sup> You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit..."*** (John 15:16)

Just as St Paul did, fight the good fight of faith bearing witness to the One who bled and died for you to save you and all mankind from sin, death, and the grave. (cf: 2 Timothy 4:7) The world will not know you are a person of faith until they witness the fruits of your faith. The fruits will not save you or make you any friends, but they must be on display to show others that you are saved by the grace of God alone through faith. Faith alone makes you good, but your works bear witness of your God given faith. Continue regularly in prayer and in Word and Sacrament so that you may be kept in the true faith until you finish the race knowing that:

***"... there is laid up for [you] the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to [you] on [the Last] day..."*** (2 Timothy 4:8)

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,  
Amen.