**How To Be Exalted**

**Luke 18:9-14**

Trinity XI – 08.28.2022

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

He [Jesus] also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself, will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Who is this God that we claim to worship?

In a bit we will define Him, confess that He is One God in three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We will confess what we believe about Him. We will confess His gracious work done in those three persons.

But have you ever thought about the fact that He is holy? What does holiness entail? It means that he is good, just, perfect, right in all things – and that's just a beginning. He is without the capability of unholiness.

We like to talk about good people. You know what I mean, right? There are those whom you and I just know are going to heaven, right? They're going to heaven because of how they live their lives. Some of them we know are – they are quietly good – we may even call them angels. And of course, like the Pharisee in our text, there are those who know they are good, you don’t even need to ask them, they will tell you how much better they are.

The problem with all of them is, they are not holy! They are not righteous before God!

We look at the outward evidence of a man or a woman, and we make our determination by ***what we have decided*** is good or bad. The problem is that we have terrible starting point. We ourselves are sinners. We come with glasses on that are stained. We have no idea whatsoever what Holiness even looks like. At least we do not have any such idea in and of ourselves.

Let me be clear! Holiness is much more than just morality. Adam and Eve became unholiness when they ate the fruit. They tried to cover their shame – to hide their unholiness. They were no longer in a right relationship with God. They were unclean because of their disobedience.

Since then, unholiness – sinfulness – has been handed down from generation to generation. We are born into it.

There is only one who is righteous and good. There is only One who is Holy – God.

We don’t think in terms of holy or unholy, to live in holiness or to live in shame. But it is the truth. Guilty consciences are nothing more than God’s writing in our hearts the fear of being unholy.

We miss out on the idea of holiness, for too often we think of God in terms of His usefulness to us. For this reason, there is very little fear of God. Many think that God's purpose is to do things for them in order to make their life easy or happy.

Do you truly understand that God demands holiness of you? This is why we are to fear Him. And by fear I'm not talking respect, awe, and reverence. I'm talking fear! Fear that God is going to lower the boom! Fear that because I am unholy, God might punish – in a place of pain and torment forever – all those who have not perfectly kept his law, and are themselves unholy.

In this parable Jesus tells of the Pharisee and the publican, one thinks he ***is*** holy. In fact, he thinks he has gone above and beyond what the law requires.

Did you notice his posture? He is bragging himself up, to God. He is extolling how good he is and what he's done. Have you ever seen such attitude if physical posture? As the bulletin picture depicts, we imagine that His face is raised up to the heavens, probably an arm lifted up too. Have you seen such postures in worship, people acting as if they have some reason to praise God because of their goodness.

The thing is this, our holy God took on our flesh. Our holy God came to be one of us. And He did this in order that He might take into His flesh our unholiness. He then took our unholiness to the cross, suffering in His flesh the penalty we owe for our ***unholiness***. In His death, He buries our shame and unrighteousness in His tomb.

What then might be the posture of those who want holiness? What is the posture of those who know that in and of themselves, they are unholy and unrighteous? What is the posture of those who know that holiness only comes from a holy, righteous God who desires to give us His own holiness? What is the posture of those who know that the greatest act of worship is to be one with the heart and mind of God?

The heart and mind of God is to make you holy!

I am not made Holy by my own will, nor by my own desires. Neither are you!

You heard our epistle lesson for today, it is so very clear. And yet, it is amazing how often it can be misinterpreted by those who want to point to themselves.

*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

By Grace you have been saved – through faith. Faith is not your own doing. Faith is a gift of God. Faith is not a result of works for this very important reason – so that no one may boast.

I pray you understand this, that even your faith is not your own work. It is God's work through Christ Jesus in you – so that neither you nor I can boast.

Faith does not call attention to itself. Faith does not jump up and down waving its arms in the air saying, “Look at me! Look at my ***FAITH***! Look what I can do.”

Faith bows its head, beats its chest, and declares, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” Faith trusts that is what God in Christ Jesus wants to do – be merciful, forgive, make sinners holy.

It is without a doubt in my mind that outwardly, the publican was a worse sinner than the Pharisee. Everyone knew it! There is the possibility that people could have even named the sins of that publican, they were so publicly well known.

Everybody also knew how good the Pharisee was. Everybody saw him praying. Many knew how much he gave to the church. He had held different positions at church His name, and his family's name were on plaques all over the church, an eyesore to God’s work and holiness on everything they ever donated. People would tell you, if there is one person going to heaven, it is him, good ole Joe Schmedlap – Pharisee exemplar!

But wait a minute, that is not they way Jesus – God Himself – tells this story. Which one did Jesus say went down to his home justified? Who was it that was righteous and holy before God?

God does not desire the death of the sinner, but that they might come to repentance and be saved. God desires to be merciful! He desires be made holy. He desires to give them His own holiness and make them holy.

That is exactly what happens in baptism. Sinners are washed clean – completely clean! They are made holy! They are clothed with Christ's own righteousness, His perfection and His own holiness become theirs!

That is why you will hear me talk again, and again, and again, about our baptismal life. The life of repentance! Repentance is nothing more than realizing our unholiness, and trusting in Christ's holiness. It is drowning the old Adam in contrition and repentance, and rising to new life In Christ.

This place in which you are gathered today is not to showcase your goodness. It is the place where you receive and display God's holiness.

If you look at the Epistles recorded in the New Testament, they are often written to “the saints” of those various cities. No, those letters were not written to dead people. They were written to folks just like you and me. In fact, as we read those letters today, they were written to us. You and I are saints!

That Greek word we see in our text as “saints” might more accurately be translated as “holy ones.” Holy ones have been made such in Christ Jesus.

So also are you! It is why we do what we do in this place. “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” And God is!

He proclaims to you the Word of Christ from the lips of His minister that you are forgiven! He exalts you! He lifts you up as holy and righteous – in His sight, and before all people!

He feeds you the very flesh pierced by your sinfulness, and His righteousness is placed into your mouth. He gives you to drink of the very blood poured out as the ransom paid for your unrighteousness, and His holiness is poured between your lips.

Dear beloved of God, you are God's holy ones! You are his saints! His precious heritage! He exalts you in His Son Jesus Christ, His righteousness is your garment of salvation today and forevermore.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.