

Reflection for October 26, 2025 – “Self-Actualization”

Inspired by Joel 2:23-29 and Luke 18:9-14

For all of you that took basic Psychology way back in high-school, or in first year university, you will be familiar with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Abraham Maslow was a psychologist most famous for his work outlining the various stages of human motivation. You see it here in this triangle he created. The foundation of his hierarchy is one's **physio**-logical needs, the essentials to life. These were things like breathing, food, water, shelter, clothing and sleep. Next came Safety and Security. That was followed by Love and Belonging. Following that Self-Esteem. And finally at the pinnacle of the hierarchy Maslow put Self-Actualization defined by morality, creativity, spontaneity, acceptance, experience, purpose, meaning and inner potential.¹ (That's the purple triangle on top of the pyramid).

I sense that the Pharisee in Luke's gospel Phylis shared with us, felt he was there, fully self-actualized. He saw himself as a person with high integrity and good morals. He felt confident in his purpose, enlightening others in religious doctrine. And he was spontaneous, being generous with his wealth. I expect he was confident he was admired by others. His acceptance level would have been quite high. He was respected in society.

In contrast, the tax-collector comes into this story with significant doubts. He is well enough off, but he reflects on his wealth realizing it has come on the backs of others, and often through unscrupulous methods. Adding to his dislike, constant contact with the hated Romans. Prior to his reflection and confession, the tax collector may have indeed thought highly of himself. After all he was successful. He may have even felt close to the top of Maslow's pyramid, fully confident in his ability, and self-reliant. But some important aspects are missing in his life, acceptance by others, a lacking morality and a realization that his inner potential has been squandered. He is humbled before God, and prays for forgiveness.

Now I am in no way remotely, enough of an authority on human psychological behaviour to question Abraham Maslow, but in our context today, I feel as if something is missing in his paradigm. Shouldn't the self-actualization piece, the place when we are fully alive and aware of self, contain some comment on humility? The pharisee may have a feeling he was on top of the world, but if he is truly to live to his full potential, he needs to understand how to be humble. His arrogance is his demise. It seems like Jesus agrees. **“For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”** Perhaps roughly translated, “Get off your high horse telling us how good you are, because God is not impressed with your bravado, your self-righteousness. All are equal in the Creator's eyes.”

Most of us are not impressed with that kind of boasting either. As if to say look at me, look how special I am, we hear, “I'm the chair of the ways and means committee. I was on the board when we made that very difficult decision to terminate the CEO. I was president of the Kiwanis Club when we built that water park for the kids downtown. Oh yes, I know Joe, we go way back. I knew him when he was a new alderman.” Enough you are thinking. “How do I escape?” A lack of some humility is a bit of a turn off.

Today our Church Calendar marks “World Peace Sunday.” As we all hope and pray for lasting peace in Gaza and a laying down of arms in the Ukraine, I can't help but wonder what part a little humility could play in World Peace. And you know, it wouldn't take a lot.

A number of our international leaders likely believe they are on the top of Maslow's hierarchy, fully convinced that they have fulfilled their inner potential. Confident, feeling they have achieved their purpose, even feeling admired, they are content. But a lack of humility breeds arrogance, something

¹ [self-actualization - Search Images](#), accessed October 25, 2025

we can all do without. Arrogance is the root of much malaise, especially when in the hands of those with power.

Joel's prophesy shares the news of barns full of wheat and vats full of wine and oil after an apocalyptic time. God has intervened and dispelled the hoards of locusts. Rain has returned to refresh the parched earth. The creator has returned as promised to restore the nation.

The empty barns of the world could be filled with much more than wheat if a modicum of humility was expressed by those with influence. Every empty vat would easily overflow if generosity was practiced and some empathy was genuinely shared. The apocalyptic times we are experiencing could all be laid to rest if Jesus' message could be heard – treat others as you would like to be treated.

We continue to hold onto that hope and pray it one day will be so. Mr. T, you are actually not on the top, the pinnacle of righteousness. Show some kindness and generosity, open your heart and perhaps one day you might approach it. Mr. P, you're not close to being a bright shining star. You are fooling yourself like the Pharisee did. Humble yourself and pray for forgiveness. Mr. Netanyahu, would you please read the account of the Pharisee and the Tax collector.

While we pray and wait, something for us all to remember.

The "Self-Actualization" stage of our being that Abraham Maslow describes is a desirable place to be. It is one of self-acceptance, self-confidence and inner peace. It is a place where we can rest assured we are satisfied with our "being" in the world, the what and who we are.

Earlier I suggested we might add something to Maslow's work, that of humility. I would like to make one more suggestion, we add Faith too.

I don't think it is important how we individually define faith. The critical thing is that we live knowing that we believe and trust in the power of divine love. That is the kind of love that fills us up and keeps us afloat in doubt and fear. It is the source of light that penetrates our grief with hope, the voice that speaks quiet assurances. When we live like that we reach our full potential and in our humble service are able to fill vacant barns and empty vats for others with soul food, the sustaining nourishment of the Holy Presence. Thanks for listening this morning, Amen