

The Tenth Sunday after Trinity Sunday  
St. Luke 18:9-14  
August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2023  
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, UAC  
Simpsonville, SC  
All Saints Ev. Lutheran Mission, UAC  
Pawleys Island, SC  
Ormond Beach Ev. Lutheran Mission, UAC  
Ormond Beach, FL  
St. Bartholomew Ev. Lutheran Mission, UAC  
Fort Myers, FL  
Pastor Jerald Dulas

He That Humbleth Himself Shall Be Exalted

*In Nomine Iesu!*

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

**Sermon Text:**

“I say unto you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”

**Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:**

O God, Who resisteth the proud, and givest grace to the humble, grant unto us true humility, after the likeness in which Thine only Son hath revealed it in Himself, that we may never be lifted up and provoke Thy wrath, but in all lowliness be made partakers of the gifts of Thy grace; through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

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

My dear friends, nobody likes to be called a sinner. Nobody likes to have their sins pointed out to them. Not really. Sure, as Lutherans we can easily say to ourselves that we are poor, miserable sinners. It is easy for us to speak in generalities. But when our sins are actually given names, then we bristle. When we are no longer speaking in generalities about being poor sinners, but actual sins are confronted, then we do not like being called a sinner; we do not like to have our sins exposed. Our Old Adam rears his ugly head and tries to convince us that such behavior, or thoughts, or words are not that bad.

This is especially true of the daily sins we commit over and over again. Not just the ones of which we are unaware or unsure whether they are sins, but also the ones which we know and feel in our hearts; the ones we keep doing and cannot stop ourselves from doing. We are tempted each time to gloss over these sins as not being so bad. Our conscience does not like to have them pointed out to us. If we were to admit that they are terrible thoughts, or words, or actions, we would have to face the fact that we are indeed poor, miserable sinners.

Poor sinners react to sin in two ways: they are either led into pride, or they are led into despair. We see this from the parable that our dear Lord + Jesus, the Christ tells us today in the Gospel of the Evangelist St. Luke. The Pharisee was puffed up with pride, and the tax collector was humbled by his sins. This is what our sins lead us to. When we are confronted with our actual sins, we can either gloss over them and pretend that they are not that bad. Like this Pharisee we instead point to our good works.

Surely, all the good things we do will cancel out the bad. Will it not? Nobody likes to think of themselves as “less than.” Especially in this society where the individual is praised so highly. Our society teaches that the only thing a person really needs is himself. We do not need to make apologies for all of our bad behavior, because it is just who we are. We puff ourselves up on our own virtue. We, like the Pharisee in the parable, do not see the horrible condition we are in when we build a foundation for ourselves based upon our own pride.

As the saying goes, “Pride cometh before a fall.” Our Lord + Jesus says it another way; a more disturbing way. This man did NOT go down justified from before the Lord. In other words, the Lord had retained his sins. He was not forgiven. He went down from the temple with the condemnation of Hell still wrapped around him. Instead of being free from the weight and bondage of sin, he chose to continue to carry the long chain of sins that imprisoned him. He chose by his pride to remain locked in the prison cell of death and damnation. “Pride cometh before a fall.” That fall leads to the Lord God’s eternal wrath and displeasure. This is what we endanger ourselves with when we cling with pride to our sins; when we act bitterly and with resentment when our actual sins are pointed out to us. And this is true whether the sins are being pointed out by someone else, or our own conscience is doing it to us. We are risking with our pride to remain unjustified—unforgiven—with our Lord God.

This is why our loving Lord + Jesus gives us an example of how to address our sins; how we are to react to the shame that our sins bring upon us. Our Lord presents us with a tax collector, a publican. I am sure we are all aware of how publicans and tax collectors were viewed in the time of our Lord. They were crooks! They robbed widows of their income, and took it for themselves. They did this to everyone. Money was their god. The Roman government did not care as long as they received their share. Therefore, tax collectors were hated by the people. They were viewed as the most corrupt individuals in their society. So, our Lord’s use of a tax collector as the person who is justified is telling.

The opposite is true of the Pharisee. The Pharisees were regarded as the model citizen, the ones people aspired to be. This one was filled with pride and did not go down justified. The publican, however, the one people hated and despised, went down justified because when confronted with his sin, he did not make light of it; he did not gloss over it; he did not ignore it, but he rooted out that sin from his heart and confessed it to the Lord God.

For those of us who have participated in private confession, we know how difficult this can be. It is not an easy thing for us to be honest with our sinfulness. This is why we should come to private confession as often as it is offered, for through it we learn to be more honest with our sinfulness. When we see ourselves sinning, we can more readily confess that sin, and receive absolution. Private confession teaches us how to no longer speak in generalities which are easy for us to do. “I am a sinner” is much easy to say than “I have committed this particular sin.” Private confession teaches us how to be honest with ourselves about our particular sins.

Unfortunately, we have lost this in our dear Lutheran Church. We teach in our Lutheran confessions—the Augsburg Confession, Article XI, to be precise—that Private Absolution is to be retained in use among us. But our church body as allowed itself to distort the words of Martin Luther in the Small Catechism when he says we should not make confession a torture; to make up or invent sins. We have been led to believe that means that we should only use Private confession when we have committed “great sins” such as murder, or adultery, or theft. But Doctor Luther provides examples for us of what sins we should confess in Private confession. “I have cursed,” “I have neglected my duties,” “I have quarreled with my equals,” “I have not prevented injury,” “I have not faithfully trained my children,” “I have spoken evil of my neighbor,” “I have set a bad example,” and the like. These are all sins which we would consider “not that bad of a sin” but these are the ones which Luther gives as examples of sins which should trouble our hearts.

That we do not consider such sins “great sins” shows us how much our society has corrupted us into dismissing our sins as terrible and condemning things. We learn from society to gloss over our sins, or even to glorify and praise our sinful behavior. Certain horrible sins are praised and exalted in our society, such as abortion and homosexuality. Instead of singing with all humility, “Alas, my God, my sins are great!” our society says of their sins, “They’re great!” like Tony the Tiger. There is a profound lack of humility in our society, and an abundance of pride and arrogance. This is because we have lost the ability to be honest about our sins and sinfulness. Who needs Private confession when we can pay someone by the hour to give us “therapy”? Who needs to be honest with their sins—the root cause of all our problems—when we can just pay someone to listen to us talk about our feelings. It has not made our society better or stronger, but weaker, for no one is actually dealing with the cause of their troubles.

The Pharisee is symbolic of our society which ignores its many problems and praises itself for its own made-up virtues. The publican in the parable, however, saw the condition that he was in. He knew that alas; his sins were great. He could not even lift up his eyes to heaven on account of the weight of his sins. This is how hard it is for us to confront our own sins. They weigh us down; they humble us to the point of despair. We cannot lift our eyes to heaven on account of the shame we feel because of them. We beat our breasts in agony feeling the guilt and shame of how much our sins have hurt us.

The publican certainly felt the weight of his sins as we see in our Lord’s description, but his contrition alone is not the reason why he went down from the temple justified before the Lord God. He went down justified, because he knew where to take his sins. He went down justified because he knew to Whom he must confess his sins; to Whom the confession of his sins would bring forgiveness. The tax collector brings his sins before the One Who can actually forgive them. He confessed his sins to the heavenly Father, Who loves a broken and contrite heart, and Who forgives us all of our sins. This man went down justified because he not only confessed his sins, but believed that the Lord God would actually forgive him of his sins on account of his contrite confession.

This is why we retain Private Absolution in our Lutheran churches, for we are given a place where we can privately confess our sins to the Lord God and hear the words of forgiveness from Him through the mouth of the minister. These sins we confess privately are forgiven, and they are forgotten, never to be divulged to anyone any more. We can go down justified because we have humbly confessed our sins and sought absolution, that is, forgiveness. This is freely offered to us through Private confession. It is offered to all those who humbly confess their sins, because our Lord + Jesus commanded it to be so.

He came down from Heaven to bring this forgiveness to us. He suffered and died on the tree of the holy cross in order that we might have peace with Him; might have peace with the Lord God. For wherever there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and peace with the Lord God. Wherever there is peace with the Lord God there is also justification. For we cannot have peace with the Lord God if we are not justified, that is, if we have not been declared righteous for Christ’s sake. For our Lord + Jesus humbled Himself to come down from Heaven, and humbled Himself upon the tree of the cross, so that He might exalt all those who cling to Him in faith. We will be exalted with Him in Heaven for all eternity, for we cling in faith to Him and His works that won our forgiveness.

Therefore, my dear friends, let us not speak in generalities about our sin, or be puffed up in pride with our good deeds, but let us rather be honest that indeed alas our sins are great, and we deserve the Lord God’s eternal wrath and displeasure because of them. But let us also place our hope and trust in the Son of God—our Lord + Jesus, the Christ—and beating our breasts in shame on account of our manifold sins and trespasses confess our sins to Him, for He receives us sinners into His loving embrace, and forgives us all our sins so that we may go down from Him justified before Him. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

**Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:**

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

**The Votum:**

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

*Soli Deo Gloria!*