**Green Blades Preaching Roundtable**

Sunday, October 23rd, 2022

Luke 18:9-14; Jeremiah 14:7-10, 19-22; Psalm 84:1-7; 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18

Reflections by Paul McLean Strike

For us readers and contributors to *Green Blades Rising*, our place at the intersection of church and environmental concern colors this Sunday’s gospel passage. Namely, the Pharisee embodies the self-righteous stereotype that dogs both Jesus followers and tree huggers, alike.

Part of this stereotype stems from the God-honest truth, of course! Who of us hasn’t felt emboldened to call out the sin of another… while our closets shake with the bones of many a skeleton? Who of us hasn’t felt that sweet, sweet twinge of righteous anger at seeing perfectly recyclable cardboard in the garbage… while knowing full well that our can contains non-recyclable plastic? The character of the self-righteous hypocrite is strong in our proverbial neck of the woods.

However, the self-righteous stereotype does also stem from mischaracterization. In the pursuit of spreading the Gospel and living out God’s will for this world, we will find no shortage of obstacles. When preaching happens—either by word or deed—tension will accompany it. People sometimes don’t like being told or shown what to do, what to believe, or what to change. Who’d-a thunk?! Because of this, the self-righteous stereotype can be used to “other-ise” those who seek realized hope in the world.

What might serve as a bridge between these two camps—the truly self-righteous and those resistant to the in-breaking of Gospel? How about the foundational act of the Lukan passage: Confession?

Why? Because confession grounds us in our relationship with God and with the world. You may have picked up the striking phrase the Pharisee: “God, I thank you that I am not like other people…” The Pharisee has cut himself off from God’s beloved creatures through his distorted gratitude—not realizing that he, too, stands short of God’s desires for him. On the other hand, the tax collector reminds us of the “justified” stance that we, too, must take before God. Head bowed, he beats his breast and the agonized words come out: “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”

When we forget confession, we cut out the root of the faith: the acknowledgment that we fall short of God’s desires for us. We forget our place: that we are beloved children of God—along with all who have been, are, and shall be. We put our need for Jesus to the side, relegating him to the backbench of our souls with labels like “teacher” and “friend” when we need him to be our “Savior”. We lose out on experiencing fully the forgiveness, mercy, and grace of absolution that frees us to go forth to love God, one another, and all of creation.

Confession and absolution through the cross of Christ are the lifeblood of faith itself. They give us the chance to see ourselves as we truly are: beloved sinners in need of God. Joining together in communal confession, we see one another in the same way. No self-righteousness is possible, nor is ugly mischaracterization. And, to God, may we be found “justified”, thanks to the cross of Jesus. Amen!

*Music suggestion:* If your church is using a sung Kyrie, consider speaking it this Sunday. You might even want to repeat the tax collector’s plea with some silence for good effect. If your church speaks the Kyrie, consider a sung Kyrie—something simple like the one from Setting 12 of *All Creation Sings*.

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