

Gospel

Luke 18:9-14

Jesus told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted."

Humility is found in the dirt

There once was a man who said such amazing things and did such wondrous things that people began to follow him. They followed him into cities and out into the desert places. Wherever Jesus went, people gathered to hear his words because his teaching was like healing and his healing was like teaching.

One day, Jesus noticed that the people who gathered to hear his voice were all very smart and religious and followed the Torah and enjoyed the respect of all the other people in the city. They trusted in themselves and the life that they chosen to live. So, Jesus decided to tell them a parable.

Two people went up to the temple to pray
Select two children to stand up and walk to the top of the steps.

One person was a Pharisee – someone who lived a very religious life and obeyed all the laws of the Torah.

Place a robe on the Pharisee and a bible in his/her hand.

One person was a tax collector – someone who gathered money for the Roman empire and cheated people to make more money than he deserved.

Give him/her a purse.

The Pharisee stood alone in the middle of the temple,

Ask the child to stand center aisle with arms outstretched and look up to heaven

The Pharisee prayed, "God I thank you that I am not like other people! Thank you for making me a better person, better than this tax collector praying in the temple." The Pharisee then began to list for God all the things that he did so well and how he did more than the law asked him to do. The Pharisee was truly an impressive person.

The Tax Collector stood far off, and would not even look up to heaven,

Ask the child to move to the side of the aisle, bending his/her head low and curling up in a kneeling position.

The Tax Collector beat his breast and prayed, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" He had done many things to injure others and take what did not belong to him. He had no list of good works or impressive deeds. He was very sorry for the way he had spent his life.

Then Jesus said something very strange,
walk over to the child playing the tax collector and lift him/her up to stand and face the congregation,

“I tell you, this person went home righteous rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

I wonder if anyone here is proud of something you do well? Do you have a talent, a gift, an ability that is special?

I wonder if anyone here has ever been unable to do something? Maybe you weren't strong enough, or fast enough, or smart enough, or patient enough?

We all are good at some things and need help with other things in our lives. Sometimes, when we are very good at something, we begin to believe that it makes us special, more special than anyone else around us. This is pride. Pride is a disease that causes us to think that we are better than other people.

Jesus wanted to heal the people of their pride by telling them this parable. Jesus wanted the people, and us, to know that in God's eyes, we are all God's children and no one is so good at anything that he or she can live without God. He wanted to remind them that we all come from the earth, no matter how good or how bad we are, no matter how smart or how foolish, no matter how strong or how weak – God created us all from the earth. I have here some earth.

Pick up dirt in my hand and hold out the dirt for the children to see and touch.

I am sure that you all are familiar with earth. It is the stuff that your mother and father make you wash off your hands and wipe off your feet before you come inside. Dirt. And yet, each of us comes from this messy, damp, earth dirt. Our highly developed brains and muscles and blood and bones began in a primordial soup of earth dirt.

In Latin the word for earth or dirt is “Humus.” This where we get our word “humble.” Have you ever heard that word before? I wonder if you have ever been humble? What does it feel like to be humble? What does it look like to be humble?

Jesus wants people to be humble. Jesus wants us to remember that we all came from the earth when God created us. No one is better than anyone else, we all came from the earth and to the earth we will return. When we are humble, when we remember that we are all from the earth, then God can exalt us and lift us up. God lifts us up, not because we are better than anyone else, but because we rely on God to take care of us, to forgive us, and to teach us how to love God and each other. When God lifts us up, we are not lifted up in a race to be bigger or better than each other. When God lifts us up, we are lifted up to be closer to God and share that closeness with everyone we meet.

When you walk outside, when you play in the earth, when you wash your hands and see the dirt stuck to your skin, when you empty dirt out of your shoes, remember that you are from earth and be humble. The God who created you will lift you up and with your feet planted in the dirt you will be close to God in the heavens.