8-12-18\_believe.in.yourself\_luke-18.9-14\_trinity.2

Sermon for Trinity 11 Genesis 4.1-15; 1 Corinthians 15.1-10; Luke 18.9-14

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

A common mantra you often hear today is "Believe in yourself." You have to have self-confidence man, you don't want to wake up in the morning thinking you're a loser. The mentality is: you have value and ability, you only have to tap into your inner strength and do what you are destined to do and be the best you can possibly be.

Is this a sound philosophy? Is this how God wants you to be thinking? "Believe in yourself."

There were people in the time of Jesus who also believed in themselves, they had great self-confidence, they woke up in the morning and pursued excellence, keeping all the commands and ordinances of God.

And Jesus **told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt**. When the Scripture says that they trusted in themselves the Greek word has the thrust that they had persuaded themselves, they were totally convinced that they were righteous.

I'm not here to give you a motivational speech, I definitely will not tell you to believe in yourself. For Jesus speaks this parable to me and to you. For you, too, have trusted in yourself, you have often persuaded and convinced yourself that you are good enough. Certainly not as bad as the thieves, liars, adulterers and all those other bad people.

**--- Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.** The temple was a place where devout believers in God would go to meditate upon the Scriptures, to remember the great works of God, to grow in knowledge and faith, believing in the Lord and trusting His promises. That is why we pray, to recall God's help in times past, to seek His help for today and thank him for all of His benefits through Jesus Christ our Lord. It is in the temple where we learn that God is merciful. [OT sacrificial system]

But those who trust in themselves use the temple, not to worship God, but to worship self. To recount all the great things I've done, and consider how excellent I am compared with those around me, this is the way the world works. ---**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.’**

This is the old man, always boasting about his accomplishments, putting others down in order to prop himself up. And shame on you for doing that very thing, looking at others with scrutinizing eyes instead of with a heart of love. For taking pride in self, maybe it's in the luxuries you have given up in order that others might notice your asceticism toward the world. That is what many of the Amish down around Chariton do. May we learn from their negative example. For they "fast" from certain technologies and luxuries that they might appear closer to God. Claiming spiritual superiority based on fasting or asceticism is pharisaical. Or what thing have you given up that you might appear closer to God?

---Or maybe you aren't even on that level, giving up things that make it appear that you're not seeking only worldly pleasure and ease. Maybe you are like the Pharisee in his other boast, giving a 1/10th of all that he earns. Do you give out of your abundance to demonstrate how generous you are? ---Whatever your shameful boast may be. Shame on you, for looking in the mirror, examining your life and thinking, not too shabby. I am righteous; I can stand before God. And the whole world concurs, good job, "Believe in yourself."

The pitiful thing about the Pharisee is how extra hard he must work to build himself up. It is a constant effort to perpetuate a lie. Once the lie is started it begins to snowball. If you stare constantly into the mirror and attempt to cover up all of the imperfections, you find that you have a big job, an impossible job. It is a job many people work themselves to death doing. Do not live the lie of the Pharisee, which ends only in death. Learn from another man, an honest man, and live.

**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, the sinner!’**

---Jesus is teaching you an invaluable lesson here. Jesus speaks to you today to persuade you of the truth. To teach you how to stand before a righteous God. For God demands perfection, there is no JV team. It is no benefit to look down at your neighbor who appears worse than yourself. Learn as the tax collector to see as the Lord sees, not looking at the outward appearances, as man does. The Lord looks inside your breast, at the heart. ---You must stand without comparing yourself to others, and there is no second chance. This is the only life you have, and in case you haven't noticed, death is constantly knocking at the door. Sometimes a tornado is a reminder of that... Who here can number his days or know when the Lord will call him home?

May you acknowledge your standing before God today... Honestly evaluate your life, like the tax collector. He sets the model of the Christian faith. Standing far off, with sorrowful eyes he does not attempt to approach God by his own merit. He had a contrite heart and beat his breast! Indeed, **a broken and contrite heart, God will not despise**. Would that your heart was broken and contrite over your sin. Over every evil thought, word and deed.--- Learn from the tax collector that this is the only way to approach God. ---Acknowledge your sin and quit believing in yourself. ---There is someone worthy of your belief and you won't find him by looking in the mirror. There is a God who is merciful, who draws you unto Himself. There is a God who justifies sinners - even tax collectors, even me, even you!

There is only one way to stand before God, and that is in the Gospel - The Good News of Jesus Christ. Stand, believing in Him. Behold your merciful God, who takes away sin. Indeed, there is much joy in heaven over one sinner who repents. May heaven always be joyful considering you who believe in Jesus.

For it was not only the Tax Collector in Jesus' parable who beat his chest. Luke records that at Jesus' Crucifixion, those who beheld it beat their chests and returned home. (Luke 23:48) It was at the Cross of Calvary that sinners, the acquaintances of Jesus, the women who followed him stood at a distance and watched. This was right worship of God, just as you do here today, beating your chest in repentance. Seeing the work of God for you.

You are now standing at a distance beholding the truth, it was over 2,000 years ago when God justified the world and that judgment still stands. Jesus did not remain dead, he rose on the Third Day and stands victor over death. It is in this Gospel that you stand today, Baptized into Christ, washed in His blood. Your pharisaical boasts, your sins, your shame are all covered. Do not boast of your works, but speak of Jesus' work on behalf of the world! If anyone boasts let him boast in the Lord.

Believe that God is merciful, even to you. As you believe this, Jesus speaks of the tax collector and of you. **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.**

There is a common mantra in the world today, "Believe in yourself." But I say to you, NO, believe in Jesus. He is the only one who makes you stand before your righteous God. Repent of thinking highly of yourself and think highly of Jesus. Regard Him alone as your Lord. You have no other confidence, stop trying to persuade yourself and others of how good you are - to keep doing this you have to lie to yourself and deny your own sin. Do not disdain and have contempt for others but have contempt for your sin. Believe in Jesus who forgives sin. You are not righteous in yourself, but Jesus gives His righteousness to you.

So go down to your house today justified. May you be humbled each and every day so that Christ may lift you up and give you a clean conscience, renewing your belief in Him always. Let this be your mantra, "I believe in Jesus." Amen

Now, the peace of God which passes all understanding, guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen