

May the words of my mouth and the mediations of my heart be acceptable to you oh God, my strength and my joy. Amen.

After dwelling in this gospel for the past week, I can't help but wonder if this parable inspired Mac Davis to write his song, It's Hard to be Humble. Now if you're not familiar with this song, the opening line sums it up quite well... It goes, "Oh Lord, it's hard to be humble when you're perfect in every way."

As the Pharisee said a prayer of thanksgiving sharing how thankful he was for his actions... And at the end of the parable, we hear Jesus calling for humility.

Now, I don't know about you, but when I hear parables with different characters, I often find myself trying to relate to one of the characters. And sometimes this happens without much effort. Other times I struggle. And sometimes, I can even see myself as multiple characters.

Yet, by doing that with this particular parable, we are instinctively drawn into a trap created by the parable.

Because by seeing ourselves as one person over the other, we end up doing exactly what the Pharisee did. As the Pharisee was critical of the tax collector.

And when we hear a parable and picture ourselves in it, we naturally become critical of what the characters are or are not doing and then we compare that to who we think we are.

And this becomes even more complicated with this particular parable. Since we each have our own thoughts of what it means to be a "Pharisee," or a "Tax Collector," we unknowingly use stereotypes to help us further interpret the parable.

And the dangerous thing about stereotypes, is that they bring judgment on others, based on something they identify with, whether it be a job, sexual orientation, ability or disability, ethnicity, politics, or religion.

Causing us to naturally lose sight of seeing others as an authentic individual who is loved by God.

And that is what Jesus is getting at through this parable... That God's mercy has no limits... Not even for someone who holds all the stereotypes of what it means to be a tax collector...

Someone who we often think of as an integral part of the corrupt Roman system, who gouged the poor to make the rich and themselves wealthier.

This parable unveils that God's mercy is vast enough to include them, because they are more than a stereotype, they are a beloved child of God.

And this is where we find the good news of this parable.

In the unimaginable depths of God's mercy and forgiveness.

And as Christians we experience this in worship... As we confess our sins and hear, that in the name of Jesus Christ our sins are forgiven.

And this confessional part of worship is always uncomfortable for me. As this time calls us to truly look at oneself as broken, flawed, and sinful.

And to admit that out loud and in community with one another is difficult.

But this should be difficult... As it is hard to hold space for the things we have done wrong. And the things we don't even know we have done wrong.

And even though we know that in Christ our sins are forgiven... We need to leave space for confession.

Especially after hearing the parable from today... A parable that ends with humility... As humility helps us to understand that our actions have no impact on God's never-ending mercy and forgiveness.

And yet, because we follow Christ, and because we trust in God's never-ending mercy and forgiveness, we are also, at the same time, called to action, and to live into God's promises.

So that through our actions we can help usher in the kingdom of God on earth, in the here and now.

A reality that calls us to confession—not so that we wallow in pity, shame, or guilt. But where we confess truthfully and wholeheartedly, trusting without a doubt that our sins are forgiven.

So how do we live into that reality?

A reality, where the future impacts how we act now.

Now that might sound strange—as it is often easier to think of how the past impacts the present.

But the future, can also impact the present.

For example, ruining a race. If you have a race that you want to run, you need to do some things before you do it. You need proper gear, proper training, and you need to sign up for the race. You need to prepare for that future, now.

And God has amazing things planned for your future... And so, you are invited to live into that future by living faithfully now.

As we heard in our reading from 2nd Timothy, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith... The Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed."

What a faith... Faith that was influenced by knowing there is nothing to fear in the future.

Because the past has opened up this space.

For Christ went to the place of all fears... And with his death he embraced all fears... So that Christ can be with you in your fears... Knowing that there is nothing you can do that will separate you from the love of God.

Which is why Christ's resurrection immersed all of creation in God's never-ending mercy, forgiveness, and love.

So that we are all invited to recognize the beautiful humanity in each person. To hold space for their authentic selves. To create community and relationships, and to do so in a way that is humble.

For each of you are precious in God's sight. You are held in God's love and you are immersed in the unimaginable depth of God's mercy and forgiveness. In the name of Jesus Christ... Amen.