

PREACHING
LUKE 14:9-18
PARABLE OF THE TAX COLLECTOR

10/23/22

In the Medieval times, there was a travelling juggler who was tired of that life and decided to enter a monastery where the Abad was his friend. The Abad told him he could stay, but he had to follow the rules and join the activities the monks did. So, he was assigned a cell, do his prayers, etc. There was a time during the day when all the monks used their talents to praise Virgin Mary, so you can find them creating the most beautiful hymns, writing poems, making sculptures and paintings, or growing the most exceptional roses garden for her. The juggler was sad because he did not have any talent, except for his juggling and pirouettes. Suddenly he started disappearing around noon time when everything was quiet and the Abad was curious and worried about this behavior. One day the Abad decided to follow him and saw that the juggler got into the sanctuary and closed the doors after him. The Abad open the door carefully just enough to see what the juggler was doing, and he was shocked. The juggler was doing his dances, jumps, twirls, and flips and all that in front of the statue of the Virgin! The Abad was beyond anger, that was a sacrilege, that was the devil over there, and when he was about to enter and reprehend him, the statue got life and the Virgin came down from her pedestal to wipe the sweat from the juggler's face. Then the Abad regretted his attitude toward his friend and recognize in him a holy man of God.

The gospel for today is telling us that there is not only one way to praise God and do church, that our way is not the only one right. Like the pharisee in the reading, the Abad was having a judgmental attitude toward the other's expression of love to God, and it was God himself who redeemed the excluded, the humble. This reading is part of a series of lessons that Jesus is teaching to the disciples about being fit to the kingdom of God by criticizing a pharisee's attitude.

First, Jesus mentions how he is convinced of his own righteousness, disdaining others, and because of this, how the pharisee excludes others from his circle. Pharisees are all over the place, they are mentioned about 99 times in the New Testament, usually as detractors of Jesus or when Jesus is telling us how they were more concerned about fasting, tithing, the

sabbath, and not the weightier matters of justice, mercy, inclusion, and faith.

When I started Neighbor to Neighbor Ministry it was very hard for me to get people to see this as a real Ministry, because it did not involve praying or worshiping in the traditional way, and because it was not intended to fill the pews up. N2N is about serving others, learning from each other, creating relationships, and involves a lot of healthcare, wellness and social justice.

Second, Jesus is not criticizing the pharisee in this particular story for his individual, cultural, and group identity. He is criticizing the attitude. For example, when we talk about Racism, when we have the anti-racism sessions, either through Neighbor-to-Neighbor ministry or any other Synod educational initiative, we are not accusing anyone, we are addressing the attitudes, we are trying people to acknowledge them and focusing on the excluded perspective. At the same time, Jesus is, by pointing at the pharisee attitude, warning the disciples about getting the same behavior toward others. Something that they have a tendency to as we had seen in other parts of the gospel.

Today, we are reminded that the crown of righteousness comes from God, not from ourselves. That the strength we need to deny our tendency to be judgmental, disdainful, exclusive, comes from God. And that God's kingdom is one of true inclusion and we as Christians are called to be that way too.