

Daily Devotional, August, 25, 2020 Who Am That I Do Not Reach Out?

***The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'* Luke 18:11-13 (NIV)**

When we witness to others, we witness more often with our lives than with anything else. In this passage we have two men presented to us. One is a Pharisee, an honored Practitioner of the Law. The second is a tax collector. He is an employee of the Roman government that occupies the land of Israel. His own people despise him as a traitor.

Notice the number of times "I" is used in verses eleven and twelve by the Pharisee. This fellow has an "I" problem. His focus is on making sure *he* does everything *he* can to be good enough in keeping the Law. Probably without his realizing it, he is living a lie. It is not the things we do or the things we don't do that make us righteous.

In the book of Isaiah we read: ***All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away. Isaiah 64:5-7.*** Even our very best efforts produced are like filthy rags before God. God knows our hearts and our intentions and loves our praises and prayers offered to Him freely, without any expectations. For there is not one thing we can do to add to the work that Jesus did on the cross to save and cleanse us from sin and to overcome death. That work was completed in full without our efforts.

This tax collector in all humility, will not stand in public praying but stands back painfully aware of his failings. He asks only for mercy from God with his head bowed. He makes no comparison of how he stands in comparison to other people. The only one he is concerned with is his standing with God. He sees his status for what it is—wholly dependent on the Lord and unable to help himself in any way.

In Matthew 9, an early event in Jesus' ministry has Him attending a party in His honor thrown by Matthew, a tax collector who would become one of the twelve disciples. In attendance were other tax collectors, and sinners (those of ill repute) that this Pharisee was sure he compared favorably with in his mind. Jesus mixed with the other guests, told them stories in the form of parables and ate, drank, and probably laughed with them. In their hearts they must have known that they were in need of spiritual help and this itinerant Rabi was one of the few who would even talk with them. Jesus took the opportunity to give them hope. He lowered himself to where their needs were and let them know the path they thought was closed to them was actually wide open.

It is in the greatest spirit of humility that I say these things. We are *not* the ones who should stand in judgment. The longer I live the more I know I do not know who God is calling. We are only made worthy by Jesus' great sacrifice that was done for the world, which happens to include us. He called us just like He called the woman caught in adultery. It was nothing we or she had done to be worthy that drew Him to us. He says the same thing to us as He did to her - Go and sin no more.

We are told to take up His mission and to go and tell the nations and make disciples. The Holy Spirit will draw them to the Christ. He will prepare the way before we even meet that person that Jesus is reaching out to with salvation. Our role is to just be ready for that moment and to follow wherever we are led.

This is the groundwork: realigning our way of thinking to understanding how dependent we are on Christ. It needs to be clear how helpless we are without Him and the Holy Spirit, who is our guide and prompter, who helps us walk the walk, and talk the talk. In this understanding we can share the grace and mercy we have been shown and not hold it all for ourselves. Just as a doctor practices medicine and a lawyer practices law, we must practice Christianity, which includes study, practice and patience. I pray that you are not sitting idly by, but will pray for the Holy Spirit's inspiration to reach out to those who could really use a dose of Christ in their lives at this time when they may have no hope!

Prayer: Lord - keep us humble and our vision clear that we are dependent on You. Holy Spirit guide and guard our hearts and minds. Amen.