

Dorset South and West Circuit – Written Service – 23rd October 2022

'Freedom in Forgiveness' – prepared by Revd John Yarrien

Call to Worship

Come, now is the time to worship. Come, now is the time to give your hearts. Come, just as you are to worship. Come, just as you are before your God, come. We come, that one day every tongue will confess you are God, one day every knee will bow. Come, fill this space with love, and peace and Hope. Amen

Prayer of Praise

We praise you, eternal God, for the world which you have created and for our place in it.

May you be praised for ever and ever.

We thank you that for us he became human, died on the cross, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven, where he reigns in glory and prays for us.

May you be praised for ever and ever.

We thank you that you have sent your Holy Spirit, to bring us to freedom and to new life in Christ.

May you be praised for ever and ever.

We give you thanks and praise, As we dedicate ourselves to you;
strengthen us by your Spirit to do your will, and bring us with all your saints
to the glory of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Prayer of Confession: -

For our foolishness and our thoughtless use of the gifts of your creation, Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

For our neglect of you, and our failure to care for others, Christ, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

For our selfishness in prayer and our carelessness in worship, Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

Silence

God of truth and love, **be merciful to us, as we claim your promised forgiveness through Jesus Christ our Lord.** God, who is faithful and just, assures us of pardon and peace. **Amen. Thanks be to God.**

Hymn: - STF 167 – Colours of Day

1 Colours of day dawn into the mind,
the sun has come up, the night is behind.
Go down in the city, into the street,
and let's give the message to the people we
meet.

*So light up the fire and let the flame burn,
open the door, let Jesus return.
Take seeds of his Spirit, let the fruit grow,
tell the people of Jesus, let his love show.*

2 Go through the park, on into the town;
the sun still shines on; it never goes down.
The light of the world is risen again;
the people of darkness are needing a friend.

3 Open your eyes, look into the sky,
the darkness has come, the sun came to die.
The evening draws on, the sun disappears,
but Jesus is living, his Spirit is near.

Sue McClellan (b. 1951), John Paculabo (b. 1946) and Keith Rycroft (b. 1949) Words and Music: © 1974, Thankyou Music.

Reading: Luke 18: 9 -14

9 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: 10 “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 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. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get. 13 “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.’ 14 “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Sermon

At the heart of our reading from Luke this morning are two characters, praying in the temple, one full of self-importance, self-worth, someone who is clear who he is. The other, seeking who he is, knowing his faults and failures, by asking God to give him the freedom of forgiveness and right relationship with God. This morning we tackle the Parable of Pharisee and Tax Collector, and we tackle our own righteousness and our own need to seek that freedom of Forgiveness.

So let's look at the facts – we know that this is a parable, a story which Jesus used to teach people, during his ministry. The two main characters are at the temple. The Pharisee at the heart of the temple, and the tax collector is set apart from the main part of the temple, somewhere in the corner. **If you were to imagine yourselves right now in the story, which Character would you be?**

So let's look at the Pharisee First. This is a guy who is pretty confident he has it all sown up. He dresses the right way, he says the right things, he does all the religious acts of ritual, and piety and learning. He declares **himself**, to be right with God. He says – I am right with God, because of my actions, because I am Pharisee. How often do we talk about **them** and **us**? I can remember as primary school it was full of little groups and pockets of people, you felt proud when you were asked to be part of one of the groups of friends – but I always felt uneasy about the people being left out the gang. The Pharisee says: “God I thank you that I am not like other people”!

In contrast then, we have the Tax Collector. He is standing off in the distance, we assume that is in the distance in comparison to the Pharisee, one version I read suggests that the Pharisee is at the centre of temple and the Tax collector is off in a quiet corner. There is a deep sense here of unworthiness, in contrast to the brash confidence of the Pharisee. His opening volley in prayer to God is: “Have mercy on me, O God, a sinner”. The Tax collector's prayer is full of self-deprecating, humility, rooted in the fact that he takes seriously making prayer to God. The parable leaves it up to us to figure it out. Who was the humble one? Who exalted himself? And who is seen as faithful in the eyes of God? **Where do you see yourselves now?**

To my mind then this is a case of how we see our place in the kingdom of God – do we brag about all the wonderful religious things we do – giving to the poor, saying our prayers, reading the bible, going to church on a Sunday, doing the bible Study on a Thursday. Or are we like the Tax collector, who in the sight of God declares I AM A SINNER – please Save me God, humbly asking for God's Love and Forgiveness? This is a question of where we place our confidence, what our self-esteem is built upon, or indeed if those things are broken, where do we receive freedom, forgiveness and strength. I believe that we must put our confidence, **not in ourselves and our own abilities**, but in our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth and the life.

So let's talk about Forgiveness here. Tax collector humbles himself in the sight of God – and declares “I am Sinner”. This is a very powerful and evocative statement to make. This is not just about forgiveness though – this is about FREEDOM, through forgiveness. There is Freedom in confessing our sins, there is freedom in asking

God for help, there is freedom in being honest about who we are and what we have done – the good but also the bad. There is freedom in coming before God, and in receiving his grace and forgiveness. This is about clearing the air, and having a right relationship with God. The Pharisee declared his own righteous, but the tax collector received forgiveness and therefore freedom from God, through his faith in Jesus Christ.

So Where does this leave us? Well I think it's quite simple really! But it may not be easy!

We are called to be Humble, Gracious, Loving and Kind. We are called to not look down on people who are not like us, but to find and follow the footsteps of Christ. So I come back again to those Wonderful words of Micah 6: **DO JUSTICE, LOVE KINDNESS and WALK HUMBLY WITH GOD.**

If we are to fulfill these words, we must be prepared to live out the humility of Christ in our lives, by seeking out opportunities to do Justice, like sending the stuff we have to Calais this week, we have to find ways to Love others, like we do on a weekly basis at the Soup Kitchen, and we have to walk humbly with God, recognizing our need for forgiveness, bringing our pains and concerns and our bad acts to God I Prayer, and knowing that in Christ we are set free from our sins. So whether you are Pharisees or tax collectors, righteous or sinful, disciples or you are lost in a world of your own satisfaction – we are called to find a corner of our temple, our church, to fall to our knees and say God we are not worthy, we have sinned against you and we ask for your forgiveness, that we might live our lives in the light of Christ's salvation for us. By doing Justice, loving with mercy and walking humbly with God, we might live in the kingdom of God's unimaginable and unexpected grace, mercy and joy. **Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession (followed by Lord's prayer and the Peace)

Let us offer our prayer
with all God's people
through Jesus Christ our Lord
who ever lives to pray for us.
We pray for the needs of the world . . .
We pray for the Church . . .
We pray for all in trouble or distress . . .
We pray for all who make a new beginning today . . .

God of compassion and mercy,
listen to our prayer.
May what we ask in Jesus Christ your Son
be done according to his word, who said,
'Ask, and you will receive,
seek, and you will find,
knock, and the door will be opened to you.'
To you, merciful God, through your Son,
in the life giving Spirit,
be glory and praise for ever. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer: -

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name;**

**Thy kingdom come;
Thy will be done;
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And Lead us not into temptation;
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
The power and the glory,
For ever and ever. Amen.**

Hymn – STF 186 – Tell out my soul

1 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!
Unnumbered blessings, give my spirit voice;
tender to me the promise of his word;
in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

2 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name!
Make known his might, the deeds his arm
has done;
his mercy sure, from age to age the same;
his holy name — the Lord, the Mighty One.

3 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!
Powers and dominions lay their glory by;
proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,
the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

4 Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!
Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord
to children's children and for evermore!

Timothy Dudley-Smith (b. 1926) Based on the Magnificat
Words: © Timothy Dudley-Smith in Europe and Africa; © Hope Publishing Company

Blessing

May the world continue to surprise us,
Love continue to astonish us,
Life continue to captivate us,
Faith continue to sustain us,
And may God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Rest, and remain with us, with those we love and those we are called to love, now in the name of Christ.
Amen.

CCL Licence Number 178041