

**“Tell Me the Stories of Jesus;
Parables that Challenge, Convict and Comfort”
“Surprised and Stereotyped”**

As we continue in our sermon series “Tell Me the Stories of Jesus; Parables that Challenge, Convict and Comfort,” this week we again look at the gospel of Luke. This story comes right after a story about a woman and unjust judge. Jesus is speaking of persistence, of faith and how we view others and treat others. A Pharisee and a tax collector are the characters in this story. In your mind, how do you see them? Do you immediately have words to describe them? Amy-Jill Levine has some interesting thoughts on that last story in her book *Short Stories by Jesus*. May this week bring new insights to each of us as we re-discover how we stereotype and talk about people out of this parable of Jesus. ----Pastor Cindy

Things I’d like to remember from today’s sermon: **“Surprised and Stereotyped”**

Prayer for the Week

Most lovely and most loving God, we place the transcript of our daily lives before you, written on the fabric of our being, and we pray that you will edit our story with the radical love of Christ Jesus. We are all not as friends think we are, we are not even what we imagine ourselves to be. Our insight is faulty and we are not able to read ourselves accurately. Look upon us with your saving mercy, loving God. Please forgive and delete every single thing that is unlovely and unloving. Correct all that is misshapen. Highlight the things worth repeating or enlarging. Rephrase the unfinished sentences so that they may continue on to declare your glory. You alone are capable, you alone can be trusted to deal with all the good and bad in our lives. Make us more yours than we have ever been before, and in being more yours, become more truly ourselves. Through Christ Jesus our Savior. Amen!

Study Guide

Monday, 8/14/17 Luke 18: 9-10

Jesus calls people to follow him. In most religious traditions, the expectation is that the spiritual teacher/leader will call the most religious or spiritual people to follow and to train. So someone working hard to learn and live their particular religious tradition would expect someone like Jesus to call them. In Jesus' day, the Pharisees were seen as the most respected and honored religious and spiritual teachers. The tax collectors on the other hand were reviled and hated. They were part of the community, BUT they worked for Rome and made their living taking taxes for Rome and adding an extra tax to make sure they themselves ended up rich. Today, just think about who you look up to as a religious leader and who you look down upon. This will help understand this parable in a way that might reveal how Jesus' followers heard and understand it.

Tuesday, 8/15 /17 Luke 18: 11-12

Everything about this Pharisee should give a reader or listener a moment to pause. Hundreds of years of Christian teaching has made the term "Pharisee" equal to "bad guy" or "dirt bag." In Jesus' day nothing could be further from the truth. If you would take a moment and write down every religious or spiritual teacher or leader you admire, then you have for the first century follower of Jesus the equivalent of "Pharisee." The words of his prayer were true, he wasn't like others: cheaters, liars, thieves, murders or adulterers. If honest, most of us compare ourselves to others and we come out looking much better. This Pharisee was being righteous...tithing and a double fast each week (which was not required) but would be admired. This Pharisee walked the "walk" and didn't just "talk" the talk. Have you ever prayed in the way the Pharisee prayed?

Wednesday, 8/16/17 Luke 18: 13

Tax collectors were not just outcasts and sinners, but were considered traitors for their willingness to work for Rome. While in the American culture there are certain negative associations with taxes and the IRS, it is not nearly as virulent as in Jesus' day. Jesus' listeners would have had no sympathy for the tax collector, the surprise would have been that he was at the temple praying at all! Going to the temple to pray was considered a good thing, a holy, sacred and spiritual practice. A dishonest, hated tax collector at the temple would have been a surprise and not pleasant one. So putting yourself in the story, who would you think was an unpleasant unexpected surprise at church? What profession or types of professions do you not associate with being religious?

Thursday, 8/17/17 Romans 9: 1-5

It is interesting to pair this reading from Paul with the story of Jesus this week. Paul does not believe that including "gentiles" in the community of faith invalidates those who have been part of the long term covenant God has with this people of Israel. It seems even in the early church there was a tendency to think "either/or" rather than "both/and." Some early Christians wanted to make gentiles into Jews BEFORE they could become Christian. Paul later in his letter defends both the covenant AND the new believers as being part of something new that God is doing in Christ. Paul is willing to forego his own salvation in order to make sure all God's people Jews and Gentiles are one in Christ. Like the Pharisee and the tax collector, all are welcome to come and experience God's love and grace, regardless of the stereotypes given. How do you experience and live out the grace of God for everyone?

Friday, 8/18/17 Luke 18: 14

In traditional readings and translations of this scripture Luke has Jesus saying, "I tell you this one went down to his home justified rather than the Pharisee." However, according to Amy-Jill Levine, the translations could be "to you I say, descending to his house, this one is justified, alongside that one." It is not exclusionary, rather inclusive of both men. Now, honestly, we don't want both to be included and certainly Jesus' listeners wouldn't have wanted the tax collector included. But, if Dr. Levine's translation is correct, they are both included. Don't we often believe this? Jesus often speaks of how the doors are open, for the lost, the lonely, the older and younger brother, fishermen, active and passive, the righteous and unrighteous. This is not a trick for people to pretend to be something they are not, this parable invites us all to look at who we are and how we categorize ourselves and others. Today, take some time and really be honest with God, pray for humbleness, pray for grace and strength and finally pray to discern where God is leading you.