



## **Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland**

**Minister: Rev Dr André J Groenewald**

8 Manse Court, East Calder, Livingston, EH53 0HF

Tel: 01506 884585, Mob: 075 888 458 14, email: [groenstes@yahoo.com](mailto:groenstes@yahoo.com)

[www.knec4jesus.org.uk](http://www.knec4jesus.org.uk)



**Date: 24<sup>th</sup> October 2010**

**Sermon: Rev Dr André Groenewald**

**Reading: Luke 18:9-14**

### **Background to the reading**

If there is one parable that forces us to look at it with first century Mediterranean glasses, it is surely this one.

When you read the parable at first, the message seems to be plain and simple. The Pharisee is the bad cop while the tax collector is the hero.

But I am afraid that is the message when we read it through our modern day glasses or when we are “pre influenced” by Luke’s introductory sentence.

To the first readers the meaning of this parable would be a totally different one. May I invite you all to put on your first century Mediterranean glasses:

In the first century life was totally different. Each had a social map that defined their place in the world. This map told them who they were, how to react, who they were related to, how to behave and who belonged to their family and who did not. The centre of the map was the family with the father as head, then the village, the city and beyond to the ends of the earth.

Our parable’s setting is the city and is told by a peasant with a peasant’s point of view to city life which was always negative. In our parable the temple is another map which replicates the kingdom of God. It clearly states who the insider and who the outsider is.

According to the map of the first century Mediterranean culture the Pharisee was most certainly the insider to the temple. He did what he

was called to do namely to go to the temple and do his daily prayers. He was one of the religious pious leaders of the nation of Israel who interpreted the law. The fact that he was standing by himself praying might suggest that this was part of the regular twice daily services. He was not praying privately. To stand and pray was normal practice. And the content of his prayer was not shocking since it was again part of the prescribed or standard form of prayer. Jewish people considered it pious to thank God for one's righteousness, rather than taking credit for it oneself. The first hearers of this parable would not think of the Pharisee as boastful, but rather as grateful to God for his piety. His prayer is one of thanksgiving since he is thanking God that he is not like the "outsiders" whom the map places outside like the "robbers, evil doers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector".

Typically, like the form prescribed he added two of his regular temple/religious duties namely his fasting and tithing. They usually fasted twice a week on the second and the fifth days of the week. The reason assigned for the selection of these days is because it was supposed to be on the second day of the week that Moses went up into Mount Sinai to receive the two tablets of the law, and it was on the fifth day of the week that he came down on account of the idolatry concerning the golden calf. These days were chosen, not only when public fasts were to be observed, but also when individuals fasted privately.

Tithing was just as equally important. So the Pharisee is just showing that he is indeed following the rules of the temple map – he is the model of the pious man.

But the temple map also settles the tax collectors place. He is standing at a distance, not allowed to lift his eyes to heaven, and speaks of himself as a "sinner" not belonging to the "insiders" of the temple map. He also does not pray a prayer of thanksgiving but one that signifies mourning by beating on his breast. He clearly knows his place according to the temple map.

Nothing so far in this parable would be out of the ordinary for a first century Mediterranean reader. Everything was happening according to the good rules of their society. This is exactly the kind of behaviour you would expect from a respected Pharisee and one of the resentful tax collectors. But then a shocking thing happens when the temple map is being reversed by the author. Instead of the usual Pharisee being

declared as the “righteous” the tax collector gets the honour. The insider becomes all of a sudden the outsider and vice versa.

So what one earth could this mean? The answer lies in the fact that in this parable the temple map is the replication of the kingdom of God. And in God’s kingdom the roles and the maps are reversed. It is not who you think is pious but God who decides. God will decide who the righteous and who the sinners are, the insiders and the outsiders. In God’s kingdom different maps and rules do apply. In our parable the holy is now outside the temple or the kingdom of God and the unholy inside the temple or the kingdom of God. Why? Because God looks with different eyes at the human race.

The old map has gone. It can no longer predict who will be an insider or an outsider. Trust God, obey Him and live in a relationship with him that is what counts!

## **Sermon**

Have you ever judged a person by their looks or behaviour? Well I am sure we all have.

I remembered an incident that happened once at a national meeting of my previous church in South Africa. There was a book published with an horrific title and the church was asked by some of its members to take a decision to stop it from being published. The moderator asked if there was anyone who would like to contribute to the debate but no one replied. Then it was decision time, but just then a professor stood up and asked the members of the meeting to put up their hands if they had ever seen the book in real life, if they had ever opened it and if they had dared to read the introduction and for the brave, who had read it completely. No hand went up! I guess the church would have banned a book judged by its colours without any debate or any insight or knowledge!

I think this parable tells us exactly how different God and His kingdom are in comparison to our views and limited insight. I have always found it quite astonishing in the pastoral side of my ministry how different God is and yet how merciful He is. In the beginning of my ministry I struggled with the fact that I could never ever give an exact answer as to why certain things happen to certain people. Over the years I have learnt that it is actually wonderfully new and afresh not to have an answer ready

when people try to make sense of God's dealings with them. The world is full of quick answers and quick judgmental decisions but God has the final answer and the final decision.

If you are sitting in this church this morning or listening through the website and you are wrestling with why certain horrible things have happened to you, remember that although it does not feel like God is with you, He is. And although you might be angry at Him or disappointed, He is still there at your side helping you to come to terms with your tragedy, whatever that may be. Although there might be no answer as to why certain things happened to you, just remember that it is God alone who still can answer you, so keep on praying – keep on asking – keep on trusting because that is all you can do!

God does what He think is good. He judges you and me differently from any other human being. He judged us in Jesus Christ and made us part of his kingdom of heaven although we are the sinners, the outsiders; the people who do not deserve even to be in his company. He changed the social maps of this world.

He gave sinners a new chance in Jesus Christ like he did in the parable. If you believe in Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension you are part of his kingdom – here and now, already. You are one of his children. You are worthy in his eyes. You are accepted. This is all that matters. Nothing else can keep you away from God's kingdom! God changed, with love, yours and my destiny. He gave us hope of the new kingdom where there will be no more tears, tribulation or suffering. The celebration of the Last Supper is our sign of remembrance of what God has done for us all.

Communion is a celebration of the fact that we the sinners are included in the table fellowship of the Lord. It is a sign that the "old map" of the insiders and the outsiders has changed. Everyone is welcome through faith alone into the presence of God.

You and I are worthy to celebrate the dawn of the new kingdom of heaven. Yes indeed we can celebrate the fact that God is so different from any human being that He looks with eyes of love, mercy and compassion at you and me, that he judges us differently!

May we go out of this church and celebrate the fact that no one can divide us from His love like Paul says in the letter to the Romans:

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,<sup>d</sup> neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Amen

---