

WELCOME 13th October 2024 – 21st Sunday after Pentecost '24 B

Luke 18:9-17

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! **Bible Study Qs/GPs** are there to equip you so God can lead you deeper into His word/work in your life, & farther out into his world to you can share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom Bible Study Catch-ups** on Friday @ 1p.m.

As we move into this week... THE GOAT...not that goat... **"THE GOAT"** like one of these... We're more familiar w/ sports stars, but it could be an author, actor, military/political leader: **"THE G.O.A.T."** "THE GREATEST OF ALL TIME." The people we turn to at 'crunch time,' when the pressure's immense...the expectations are high...& everyone's watching.

When that's you...in the spotlight/in the moment, the internal fear of not being good enough is hard. Sweaty palms/jitters are nothing compared to coming up short...not getting it done. Sometimes life feels like one big performance review...& it's not just our jobs. Marriages, parenting, relationships, even our politics & faith can seem like a constant review of our worthiness...wisdom.

The good news is our perfect performance is never a requirement for a relationship with God. Our "success" doesn't earn us kingdom credits & our less than stellar execution won't exclude us from a place in his kingdom. Our deeds are never equal to his character. Our disasters never greater than his gift. Jesus promised...

"Come to me, all of you who are weary & carry heavy burdens, & I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble & gentle at heart, & you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy & my burden is light."

You are who you are only because of who Christ is & what he's done for you.

We'll experience & share that today...Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

*Lord God of justice & righteousness, you know no favourites & show no partiality; but you have given us assurance that the prayers of the lowly pierce the clouds, their petitions reach the heavens. Look upon us who come before you as did the penitent tax collector, & open our hearts with confidence to your mercy so we may experience rightness with you & live in you by your grace alone.
We ask this through your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Let's hear God's Word

FAITH CHAT:

1. As a child, who was your favourite person outside of your family? Why?
2. "God, I thank you that I am not _____." (fill in the blank)

21 Pentecost '24 B – PRESSURE POINTS: PERFORMANCE PRESSURE

“2nd place is just the first loser” I heard that originally from US Olympic sprinter **Michael** Johnson...heard it countless times since...athletes, entrepreneurs, politicians, musicians, personal coaches...even church leaders. Humans are driven to compete...to measure our performance against that of someone else. Whether it's bags/acre, kilometres/hour, ATAR, budget, worship attendance or # of conversions at your evangelism rally...Humans are driven to compete...to pit my efforts against yours, theirs, or some std. I'd bet every one of us in this room has at some point **NOT** come in 1st. Whether **WE** were competing or our team was on the field or our candidate had to make a tearful concession speech...every one of us knows that ugly reality. We've been **THAT** guy...1st loser...maybe more than once...?

Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness & scorned everyone else... That tends to happen when you are routinely among the “winners.” From the top of life's dog pile, everyone else just doesn't measure up...& as Luke recounts the narrative of Jesus' life there are 2 moments when 2 men are measured & their scorecards differ wildly from Jesus'... This is the first: **Two** men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, & the other was a despised tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself & prayed this prayer: ‘I thank you, God that I am not like other people...’ God thanks I'm so awesome. “Lord, it's hard to be humble when you're perfect in every way. I can't wait to look in the mirror, 'cos I get better looking each day.” *That's that guy!*

He's Showing off for God. His religious accomplishments are by every measure, excellent! Fasting. Tithing. Strict adherence to the law. He may well keep a tally sheet of the commandments he daily observes on his bedside table. Even his prayer, as abhorrent as it sounds to our ears, was actually reflected in Jewish daily prayer routines. There is a prayer the head of an observant Jewish household would pray that reads, “**Blessed** are you Lord our God King of the universe, who in your wisdom did not make me a Gentile, a woman or a slave.” To us it sounds horrific! But I'm told it was intended to be a reminder that as a free Jewish male the **PRAY**-er was invested w/ enormous responsibility **AND** accountability. As a Jew he's entrusted w/ the Law...he is to be steeped in the word of Yahweh...God's word is to be for him a “lamp to my feet & a light for my path.” No other nation possessed such a treasure. It was meant to be lived as a blessing to the Jews & a sign of God's intention for all nations. Responsibility **AND** accountability. As a man he was not only head of the household but responsible **AND** accountable for the faithfulness of the household...to pass on God's promises & the accounts of God's mighty deeds generation/generation.

We will not hide these truths from our children; we will tell the next generation about the glorious deeds of the Lord, about his power & his mighty wonders. – Ps 78:4 His freedom was meant to be used for obedience & good deeds. Slaves did not enjoy such opportunities. It sounds awful to us, but to the faithful Jewish male...

But Jesus knows, **NB** this is a parable...Jesus isn't quoting prayers he's overheard in the Temple...he's reminding us that even in our blessings we act out the sinner we are. We, unimaginably blessed, look down our noses at those who seem to have squandered what God has multiplied in us. **Thank** you Lord that I'm not like _____ & whether it embarrasses us or not...we can all fill in that blank. Oh we may get all pious & humble, “There but for the grace of God go I,” but we know what we mean & so surely does God.

But the tax collector stood at a distance & dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, ‘O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.’ I can see the guy...head in his hands leaning against the back wall so he doesn't fall over...‘God I got nothing...I know I stink to me too...nothing of me would ever make you happy but I'm counting on you to be the God I've heard is “gracious, & merciful slow to anger & abounding in steadfast love,” 'cos if you're not I'm a dead man walking.’ When showing off **FOR** God is **not** an option, Crying out **TO** God is what you do...that's this guy. I've been that guy...more than once when I knew I had blown it & couldn't even face myself in the mirror. Maybe you too... **(Jesus said)** ‘I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, & those who humble themselves will be exalted.’

The good news? In Jesus' kingdom, the loser wins...who goes home at peace in a restored relationship w/ God that allows tomorrow to be a new day not just same garbage different date. Jesus reaches out a reassuring hand to take hold of us & guarantees that those who have no claim on goodness & know it...make no pretense to perfection discover God's goodness is enough...abundantly enough.

Much later in the narrative Luke sees 2 more men in similar circumstances, except this time they're not in the temple...& it's not a parable. **Two** others, both criminals, were led out to be executed with Jesus. When they came to a place called *The Skull*, they nailed Jesus to the cross. The criminals were also crucified—one on his right & one on his left...One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed, ‘So you're the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself & us, too, while you're at it!’ But the other criminal protested, ‘Don't you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn't done anything wrong.’ Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.’ Jesus replied, ‘I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.’ – Luke 23:32, 39-43

At this moment they're all losers. Three men dying together at the hands of an effective killing machine...the Roman Empire. One though, is still acting like he's in command of the situation: 'You're the Big Guy? Let me explain this...get us outta here!' He so badly wants to strut his stuff, even if he has to use someone else to do it. But the other guy, "Hey! Don't be a goose! We've earned these nails. We're answering to human law & soon enough God himself. But this guy's innocent & he's stuck here w/ us. Jesus...I got nothing to offer, but when the world gets made right like you've said...maybe there's room for a schmoe like me.' "I've got just such a place...today in fact."

When showing off *FOR* God is not an option, crying out *TO* God is what you do... Again the one who has no claim on goodness & knows it...makes no pretense to perfection discovers God's goodness is enough...abundantly enough...He dies at peace in a restored relationship w/ God that allows tomorrow to be an eternity long.

Luke wrapped up that first narrative this way...**One** day some parents brought their little children to Jesus so he could touch & bless them. But when the disciples saw this, they scolded the parents for bothering him. Then Jesus called for the children & said to the disciples, "Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children. I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn't receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it."

I have no idea why the disciples would want to make Jesus a "child-free" zone...but clearly at that moment they're acting like the 1st guy in the temple & the one guy on the cross...In command. In charge. Looking down on those who are "less than" them. But Jesus is drawn to those who have nothing to offer, who are completely dependent on him...who will simply be glad to receive whatever blessing he offers... who are content to just be w/ him...who are overjoyed to know they are radically loved...as fmr Jesuit Priest Brenna Manning writes in his brilliant book *Abba's Child*, **"Define** yourself as one radically loved by God-this is your true self. All other identity is illusion" If you build who you are on what you do...accolades, accomplishments, achievements...you'll always be grasping for more & always come away empty-handed. But if who you are is rooted & growing from who Christ is & what he's done for you...you find perfect peace, perfect love, a relationship of hope & joy...a place in him today & forever...**AND** a way to love others into his love. When showing off *FOR* God is not an option, crying out *TO* God is what you do...

"Come to me, all of you who are weary & carry heavy burdens, & I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble & gentle at heart, & you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy & my burden is light."

You are who you are only because of who Christ is & what he's done for you.

TAKE IT HOME: (take a bit & share with your neighbour)

What is one "failure" you can hand back to Jesus this week trusting he will forgive, restore, & offer his burden in return?

Let's pray...

Father, we sit at your feet in the name of & in the arms of your Son, Jesus. Drench us with your love again. Remind us how our weakness is where you unleash your mighty power & our failure where your forgiveness finds its true purpose.

Send us into your world w/ a word of resurrection hope & eternal joy. Use us to bless others to your glory in ways we never dreamed possible. Father we shy away from speaking your Name. Heal us of that illness. We fear the scorn of others if we live too much like Jesus. Command your angels to defend us from the fear of what cannot overcome us. Let your enormous generosity come to life in us in all things. We ask all this & whatever you know we need but would never ask...for your name's sake. We cry out to you knowing we could never show for you...Amen