

# REFLECTION OF GRACE

A Weekly Reflection on Stewardship from our Members



**Sunday, October 23 | Gospel**  
**Luke 18: 9-14**

 GRACE  
in ACTION

Jesus told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted."

## THE PHARISEE AND TAX COLLECTOR

By Tom Dwyer

How often do we seek relief from God? I know I have probably received more than deserved, but I will continue as the Grace of God is infinite. Interestingly, today's reading provides insight and helps us to consider how we ask. Do we internalize and justify our ask, or simply ask for mercy?

Reading this parable over and over left me with a single theme: perhaps I'm the Pharisee! Oh no, that couldn't be - I'm much humbler than that guy. I do support the church, I work on community projects, I have pitched in when asked, and I respect others... so why do I feel like Christ was talking directly to me? Probably because there are a lot of "I's" in what I ask for.

What we observed in this parable is that the Pharisee is an "I" guy justifying his existence, and his prayer is nothing like the one Jesus teaches his disciples to pray.

Here's an interesting thought: What if we were a part of the parable, and as the third participant, we were listening and forming a judgment on the other two. Who would we favor? Whom would you want to "hang with"? The Pharisee, who is distinguished by strict observance of the traditional and

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written law and who thinks himself superior, or the tax collector - a scoundrel, a forgotten soul hiding in the shadows? Remember, during Jesus' time, tax collectors were thought sinners. The tax collector in this parable is a picture of shame, and he is a man of few words: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"

How often have we asked for mercy without attached wish lists for ourselves or family or friends? Barack Obama once said, "We are reminded that, in the fleeting time we have on this Earth, what matters is not wealth, or status, or power, or fame, but rather how well we have loved and what small part we have played in making the lives of other people better."

God's grace leads us to think in broad strokes, placing others ahead of ourselves in support of our beliefs and fulfilling our mission. The mission of The Episcopal Church is "to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ." Here at Ascension, we drill down into the specifics of what that means with our own mission statement: "We strive to be a radically inclusive community with diverse and vibrant worship, intentionally focused on children and youth caring for each other, and being the hands and feet of Christ in all that we do."

As we support this mission with time, talent, and treasure, be assured that your support of our Church will truly follow this mission, and together we will keep our promises to God and our community.

The good news is that the role of the tax collector and God's mercy is available to all of us. We and everyone around us will receive God's Grace and Mercy by simply asking, as we are children of a gracious Father.

Our family joined The Episcopal Church of the Ascension in October of 1990. Thirty-Three years later I'm still learning about faith, diversity, and the challenges Christianity brings to your mind and soul. I am finding it difficult to write about myself after reflecting on and writing about Luke's Gospel today, but I'll try to be objective and keep a family perspective.

I'm retired from a 45-year career in healthcare real estate development. I am active in the not-for-profit boards and spend much of my time with travel, hobbies, friends, and family. I currently serve on the Vestry and stewardship committee and support Ascension Day School as our vestry representative.

Dabney, Christopher, and I joined Ascension when we were looking for a church home. It was close to us and seemed to meet our needs. What we found was much more! Outreach, diversity, connections to clergy and lay ministers, and the never-ending opportunities to participate in a variety of our church's activities. We have been Vestry, Search and Discernment Committee leaders and members, and we have participated in Youth programs, field trips, and our outreach ministries, many of which Dabney started.

These experiences have provided unforgettable memories and many remarkable experiences. Our family has been involved with the National Church, the Dallas Diocese, and the Diocese of Texas, but most importantly, we have been blessed with many unending church friendships that continue to blossom today. Thirty-Three years has gone by quickly! We raised our family here with you, and we cannot express the gratitude we feel to have been blessed by this wonderful church family.

