

Read: Luke 18:9-14

Ash Wednesday

Luke 18:10-14

“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 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. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

“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.’

“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.”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

You couldn't find two people who were more different than these two guys. One was a Pharisee. The Pharisees were a group of people who set themselves apart as special by doing extra things for God. They thought God would love them more when they did these extra things. This man in particular really thought he was special. He even bragged and boasted out loud in front of other people that he was so great—that he gave so much money to God and that he wasn't as bad as other “sinners.”

The other man was a tax collector. This means that he collected tax money from his own Jewish people and gave it to the Romans. While many didn't like this, the bad part was that most tax collectors cheated people and stole some of the money for themselves. This particular tax collector felt terrible about all his sins. He felt so guilty that he couldn't even look up to heaven. Instead, he bowed his head and begged and pleaded, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

So . . . which guy are you?

That may sound strange, but remember that Jesus told this story to teach us something. Jesus wants us to understand that sometimes we sin by being proud and boastful, by thinking that we don't sin much and that we are better than other people—just like the Pharisee. But other times we are like the tax collector and feel so bad and guilty about all that we have done! So which guy am I? I am both! Sometimes I'm a proud Pharisee and sometimes I'm a guilty tax collector.

Now here's the most important question—which of the two in the story had a good relationship with God? Or in other words, which sinner did God forgive? Jesus tells us that God forgave the tax

collector. Why? Because the tax collector repented. He was sorry for his sins, asked God for forgiveness, and wanted to make a change in his life.

This week includes Ash Wednesday, the first day of the church season we call Lent. Lent is a time for us to be like the tax collector. We remember our many sins, and we repent—we turn to God for forgiveness. But friends, rejoice! During Lent we will follow Jesus to the cross where he paid for all our sins so that we can be forgiven just like the tax collector. God bless our journey with Jesus to the cross this year!

The questions below are to help families discuss this devotion. The questions are divided by age group as suggestions, but anyone could reflect on any of the questions as they desire.

Questions for the Younger Children

- What made the Pharisee so proud that he would brag to others?
- Why did the tax collector feel so guilty and sad?

Questions for Elementary Age Children

- Explain how people sometimes act like the Pharisee in this story.
- Explain how people sometimes act like the tax collector in this story.

Questions for Middle School and Above

- The word *repent* literally means *to change your mind* or *to turn around*. Explain in your own words then what it means for us to *repent* of our sins.
- Agree or Disagree: God will not forgive any sin unless you first repent of it. Explain your answer.

Closing Prayer:

Dear Lord, have mercy on us. We are sorry for our sins. We look to you for forgiveness, and we rejoice that you have paid for all we have done at the cross. Thank you! Amen.

Hymn: CW 304:1,4,5 – Jesus Sinners Does Receive

Jesus sinners does receive; Oh, may all this saying ponder
Who in sin's delusions live And from God and heaven wander.
Here is hope for all who grieve—Jesus sinners does receive.

Come, O sinners, one and all, Come, accept his invitation.
Come, obey his gracious call; Come and take his free salvation!
Firmly in these words believe—Jesus sinners does receive.

I, a sinner, come to you With a penitent confession.
Savior, show me mercy, too; Grant for all my sins remission.
Let these words my soul relieve—Jesus sinners does receive.