

**Where do we Stand?**  
**October 23, 2022**

**[VIDEO - Unaware]**

A long time ago...  
In a land far far away...  
I used to have a significant lawn to mow.  
Not any more...

Another reason I love Colorado.  
We have a postage stamp of a front lawn...  
And paver patio in the back...  
So it takes about a total of five minutes... to mow.

It is Perfect!

But back in the day... **[1 Mowing]**  
We had about a quarter acre of lawn to mow.  
It would take a little bit more effort...  
So I would put on my headphones...  
And listen to music as I worked.

Now if there happened to be...  
A good song... a song that I loved...  
Which there always was...  
Because I was the DJ...  
I would sing.

Of course... with the mower going...  
I had no idea... what my personal volume...  
Was set to...

I think I turned it up to 10...  
And broke off the knob...

Because one day... when I was singing...  
I mean... mowing...  
A miscellaneous daughter...  
One of many...

Came up behind me...  
Tapped me on the shoulder...  
And said... you're singing REALLY LOUDLY!  
We can hear you inside the house.

I asked her... was it good?  
Her response...  
Was a dramatic eye roll.

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Anyhow.  
What about you?

Do you sing at home?  
Do you sing when you mow? **[2 Shower]**  
Do you sing in the shower?

Are you any good?  
Linda... make sure...  
You write down their names!

Do you talk to yourself...  
When no one else is home?  
You know... mumble to yourself...  
About how no one appreciates...  
Everything you do?

Have you ever muttered... under your breath...  
Would it kill ya...  
To turn off a light?  
Or put your laundry in the basket?  
When no one else is home?

Do you dance in the kitchen?  
Or in the bathroom...  
In front of the mirror...  
Checking out your moves?

Or how about this?  
Do you yell at other cars...  
On I-25... when you know...  
The other drivers can't possibly hear you?

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Now listen.  
I think those moments...  
When no one else is around...  
When we completely let loose...  
Of our social inhibitions...

And let our songs...  
Or our dance moves...  
Or our words...  
Or our prayers...  
Just let them fly... into the cosmos...  
Reveal something... about us.

It gets at something that is true... and honest.

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Maybe it's as simple as...  
I really like singing.  
Don't want to do it for anyone else...  
Don't want to sing karaoke.  
In some bar downtown.

But I like to sing.  
I like how it sounds.  
It makes me feel good.

Or on the other hand...  
Maybe when we mutter to ourselves...  
We are really saying something like...

I feel kind of alone.  
Like no one helps me around the house.  
Like everything depends on me.  
And that doesn't feel good.

Anyway... my point is...  
When we do these secret things...  
Often... our true self...  
The intentions of our hearts...  
Are revealed.

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Jesus tells a story. **[3 Parable]**  
Another parable.  
But unlike last week's story...  
This one is kind of... fun? Interesting?  
How about clear.

Jesus sets the stage for this story...  
By telling us... what it is all about.

It's a warning... to people...  
Who trust in themselves....  
And their own righteousness...  
AND regard other people with contempt.

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So there were two guys. **[4 Two Guys]**  
Who are going up to the Temple...  
To pray.  
Good start Jesus.  
Praying is a good thing to do.

Well... the first guy...  
Was a Pharisee...  
A religious leader...  
In the church...  
Of Jesus' day.

When he begins praying...  
He gives God...  
His resume. **[5 Me]**

I have done this.  
I have done that.  
He is the subject of every sentence.  
He is the one doing all the action...

I thank you God.  
I am not like other people.

I fast twice a week.  
I give 10%.  
I, I, I, I, I.

It's all about him.

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And before we get all self-righteous...  
About this guy's self-righteousness...  
We have to recognize...  
We do this same thing... all the time.

Maybe not... to this exaggerated extent...

But we say things... like...  
I'm a good person.  
I'm nice.

I don't punch people...  
Or kick dogs...  
Or do anything destructive...  
Or illegal...  
Or naughty.

I may not be religious...  
But I'm basically... good.

We give God... our informal resume...

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And then sometimes...  
When something bad happens...  
We say... what did I do wrong?  
Why is God punishing me?  
I'm a good person.

See... that's just the flip side of the same coin.  
It's still about what WE do.  
We are still the subject...  
Of our own righteousness.

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But what if it's not about...  
Our actions.

What if God doesn't love us...  
Based on how much we accomplish.  
Or how good we have been.

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Which brings us back...  
To the parable... **[6 Two Guys]**  
I don't know...  
If you noticed this or not...

But in Jesus' story...  
This Pharisee... was...  
STANDING ALL BY HIMSELF.  
That's what bible says.

Two things about that.

First... he wasn't trying to impress any other people.  
Remember when Jesus said...  
Don't be like the Pharisees...  
Who stand on the street corner...  
And pray really loud...  
So everyone can see how holy they are.

That's not what's happening here.  
No one could hear him.  
He was off by himself.

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Since no one was there...  
To me... that gives the sense...  
That this is what he really thought.  
This is how he felt...  
Deep within his heart.

So when he said...  
Thank God... I'm not like...  
All those other people.

Thieves. Rogues. Adulterers.  
Or even God forbid...  
That dirty rotten tax collector... over there.

Thank God... I'm not a sinner.

Those words are raw... and honest.  
He didn't try to hide...  
What he was thinking...  
Or make his words...  
Politically correct.

Because NO ONE ELSE WAS THERE!

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Secondly... he was alone.  
He was standing on his own.  
By himself.

Someone was missing.  
When we pray... we aren't alone.

Prayer is a conversation with God.  
When we pray.  
God is with us.  
God hears us.  
God is present.

But this guy is standing on his own.  
He was so righteous...  
He had no need for God.

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NOW... enter the tax collector...  
You can boo if you want.

Remember... tax collectors...  
Were hated members...  
Of Jewish society.

They were working for the Roman government.  
They were taking money from hard working people.  
And giving it to the enemy.

And on top of that... they were charging extra...  
So they could line their own pockets.

So this guy... probably wasn't the greatest guy.  
And he knew it.  
He wouldn't come near... The Temple.

It says... that he stand FAR OFF.  
Again all by himself... for a different reason.  
Because he didn't feel worthy.

Like he doesn't quite belong... in the church.  
With all these holy good people...  
He knows he's not good.

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Please notice...  
He does not make himself...  
The subject of the prayer.

He doesn't rattle off...  
A litany of how wonderful he is.  
All the amazing things...  
He has done.

He doesn't justify himself before God.  
He doesn't push...  
Other people down...  
To the ground...

In order to make himself feel better.  
And raise himself up.

Instead... he is completely honestly overwhelmed...  
By his own sinfulness.  
He is broken.

When he prays...  
God is the subject.  
O God... please help me.

Be merciful to me..  
A sinner...

In his prayer..  
He is the object..  
Upon which God will act.

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Then Jesus sums it up..  
And says...

I tell you.  
This man..  
Not the other guy..  
This lowly tax collector..  
Went home justified.

Because... **[7 Exalt-Humble]**  
All who exalt themselves..  
Will be humbled.  
But all who humble themselves..  
Will be exalted.

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This is an idea..  
That Jesus taught..  
Over and over again.

It's one of the core themes..  
Of the gospel.

If we don't get this..  
Chances are... we don't get Jesus.

It's actually how Jesus lived his life..  
The example he gave us.  
And called us to follow.

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But at the same time..  
It's also... incredibly hard..  
To fully integrate this teaching..  
Into our daily life.

Because so many times..  
We get defensive..  
So often we feel like..  
We have to justify ourselves.

And mixed somewhere in that process..  
Of self-justification..  
Is the idea of comparing ourselves..  
To other people.

We like to take sides.  
Make ourselves the heroes...

And people different than us...  
We like to make them the villains.

And Jesus says...  
First of all...  
That's not true.  
All have sinned.

And secondly...  
That's not how I want you to live.

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Because if we have truly integrated...  
What Jesus is teaching...  
Into our lives

Then two things.  
We can't look at people the same way.  
We just can't.

If we understand...  
That we are sinners.  
If that's our starting point.

If we know... beyond a doubt... **[8 Mercy For All]**  
That WE have received mercy upon mercy...  
From a God who loves us...  
Even when we were sinners.

Then we can't...  
It's not possible...  
To look at other people...  
Like they are nothing.

We can't hold them in contempt.  
Like they don't deserve...  
The same love  
The same mercy  
The same hope...  
That we ourselves...  
Have received from God.

If God is merciful to sinners...  
It's either... all sinners...  
ALL OF US.  
Or it's none of us.

It's like a light switch...  
It's either on...  
Or off.

If you are beyond the scope of God's love... and mercy.  
Then I am beyond the scope of God's love... and mercy.

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You know that verse...  
From John 3:16...  
God so loved...  
The World.

It's universal.  
God's love is universal.  
It is for everyone.  
The whole world.

We do not have the option...  
In our faith...  
To pick and choose...  
Who we think is worthy.

That is not our business.  
We proclaim the love and mercy...  
To all people.

We can't choose who we think is good.  
Because God has already declared...  
That in Christ... all are loved.

And it has to be consistent.  
We can't cherry pick..  
Theological ideas...  
That fit with our personal preferences.

God has chosen.

So. It has to be one or the other.  
All people.  
Or no people.

And before you all accuse me...  
Of being a Universalist...  
I know... that we humans...  
Can still reject God's love.  
Can still act like there is no God.

The point is...  
We can't choose who is worthy...  
To receive God's grace.

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And honestly.  
The only choice we have to make... **[9 Stand]**  
Is where do we stand?

Do we stand with the Pharisee...  
Full of pride...  
From all our good works...  
That ultimately mean nothing.

Or do we stand with the tax collector...  
Far off... and cry out to God...  
For mercy and love.

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And as you decide...  
Who you want to be.  
Remember.

A litany of good works...  
Does not impress God...

What impresses God...  
Or more accurately...  
What makes us ready...  
To receive God's love and mercy...

Is a humble heart.  
A thankful heart.  
A merciful heart.

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So Beloved. Know this.  
God loves us right now.  
Even though we are sinners.

Rejoice! We are free.  
We don't have work so hard.  
Because we cannot earn...  
What God has already freely given us.  
Through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Thanks be to God.  
Amen.