

Gospel lesson

Prayer is about more than the words used. Today we hear Jesus teach His disciples about attitude of prayer.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/lumo-pharisee-tax-collector/>;
credit: Courtesy of Lumo Project Films - www.lumoproject.com

Luke 18:9-14

⁹ He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt:

¹⁰ "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

¹¹ 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.

¹² I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.'

¹³ 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!'

¹⁴ 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 Word of God for the people of God

<Children's/Interactive time>

What does it mean to "show some attitude"?

<Let them respond>

What is an attitude of prayer? <Let them respond>

Is it about physical posture? <Let them respond>

What do you think makes a prayer real before God?

<Let them respond>

How about sharing our faith? Do you ever see people posturing but not really meaning it?

<Let them respond>

What do you think God considers "good" sharing of our faith? <Let them respond>

Jesus was a servant leader, doing loving acts to show people how God calls us to live rather than just talking about it. He even humbled Himself enough to die on the cross for us, that we could know God's love. Let us all humbly live to share God's love in all that we say and do.

<Hymn "Close to Thee"—————UMH #407>

A Pharisee Was Praying

D A⁷ D G A⁷ D

1. A Phar - i - see was pray - ing; he proud - ly stood a - lone:
 2. Far off in that same tem - ple, a tax col - lec - tor stood.
 3. O God of love, for - give us when we look all a - round
 4. May we, your church, be hum - ble in serv - ing you each day,

F⁷ G A D E⁷ A

"God, thank you that I'm bet - ter than oth - ers I have known."
 He knew he was a sin - ner; he knew that God is good.
 and think that, by our ac - tions, we stand on sol - id ground:
 for pride will nev - er help us to walk your king - dom - way.

D G D Bm B Em

He saw the faults of oth - ers, yet in that ho - ly place,
 "Have mer - cy, God, up - on me!" the tax col - lec - tor cried.
 we pray, "See how we serve you! We work and vol - un - teer!
 May we know your for - give - ness, our need for mer - cy, too,

A D G Em⁷ A⁷ D

he missed the joy and won - der of God's a - maz - ing grace.
 He left that place of wor - ship for - giv - en, jus - ti - fied.
 Aren't we the ones whose giv - ing builds up your king - dom here?"
 that, loved and lov - ing oth - ers, our life may be in you.

WORDS: Carolyn Winfrey Gillette, 2013 (Luke 18:9-14)
 MUSIC: Samuel Sebastian Wesley, 1864 (1810-1876)

AURELIA
 76.76 D

Tune UMH #545; this rendition from
<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1300228085482296&set=a.413019577536489>

Message: Humble Faith



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/choosing-faith/twentieth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-c-lectionary-planning-notes/twentieth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-c-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Good and gracious God,

as we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may learn how to serve You more humbly and faithfully, and help others to experience Your grace as well. Amen.

We conclude the "Choosing Faith" series today with "Humble Faith":

"How shall we pray? This isn't the text where that question appears. But it does seem to be behind the parable that Jesus tells."

That Pharisee in the parable sure sounded like a braggart, didn't he? I think a person has got to be pretty bold to brag before God – especially since God knows the truth about each one of us already.



background picture from <https://www.olympics.com/en/news/with-second-olympic-all-around-title-in-hand-simone-biles-has-necklace-to-match>; credit: Getty Images

Simone Biles wore a goat necklace after her second Olympic all-around win, to celebrate her achievement. When some complained about her ego, she made the case that if a random person says that they are the greatest of all time, they are probably exaggerating. However, she has data as the most decorated gymnast

in history to support her saying that she is the greatest gymnast of all time (to date).

One thing I like about her is that she does not belittle or even go around simply claiming to be better than other gymnasts. Instead, she set up a gym to help others train to be the best gymnasts they can be and, because of her own experiences, is a big advocate for foster kids and mental health.

After the Tokyo Olympics, Simone expressed a sentiment put forth 2500 years ago by Chinese philosopher Laozi (Lao Tzu): if you take care of your mental wellbeing first, the rest will fall into place. We can similarly say about our faith, if you take care of your attitude toward God first, the rest will fall into place.

Consider the ancient Hebrews: when they focused on materialism and idolatry, God let them feel the effects of their sin and they suffered. When they turned back to God, the Lord blessed them with bounty and promised those who called upon God would survive the “great and terrible day” when the Lord comes. The faithful responded with great praise; today’s psalmist went on about the great deeds of the God.



picture from https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a9/Saint_Paul%2C_Rembrandt_van_Rijn_%28and_Workshop%3F%29%2C_c._1657.jpg; credit: Rembrandt van Rijn (and Workshop?) (Dutch, 1606 - 1669), The Apostle Paul, c. 1657, oil on canvas, Widener Collection

Paul, arguably the greatest apostle of all time because of his letters and his work with Gentiles, was very focused on the God of the Hebrews. As Saul, he had been taught that temple rituals were of utmost

importance and that the Christians were threatening the safety of the Jews worshipping there, given Roman domination and the Christians' talk of a new king.

Jesus interceded with Saul, to reset his attitude. His faith was not supposed to be about the temple and rituals, it was supposed to be about love, about relationships, about living in healthy community with God and with one another – as the laws tried to get the people to do and we are called to do today. Once his attitude toward Jesus, God, and Christians was reset, everything else fell into place for Paul.

So when we read his farewell letter to Timothy today, he is not bragging about his own accomplishments as though people should celebrate him. Instead, he is reassuring those who will miss him that he will be fine, because he has finished the work he had to do and the Lord will take care of him. Like Simone Biles encourages young gymnasts today, Paul encouraged Timothy to work on sharing the Good News.

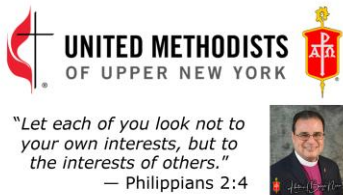
Before his encounter on the road to Damascus with Jesus, Paul was prideful, considering himself “a Pharisee among Pharisees.” After his attitude reset, Paul became humble, working alongside and learning crafts from those he sought to tell about Jesus. He used the love of God to make them feel valued, that their hearts would be open the great gift he was delivering from the Lord.

Jesus saw the same pride and haughtiness during His ministry. We are not sure who it was that triggered the telling of today's parable. Maybe it was His

disciples, maybe it was someone who put down His disciples, or maybe it was someone the disciples simply observed. Whomever it was, Jesus taught that such prideful behavior is not acceptable before God.

Sadly, we see many, many examples of prideful behavior today. Many people in power act like they are better than those affected by their decisions. The wealthy often act like they are better and deserve more than those who have less, dismissing the work of the poor as simply insufficient effort.

That sort of prideful dismissiveness has led to the cutting of programs designed to help the poor. Jesus never asked if the thousands He fed had earned it; He simply saw hungry people and fed them. But since so many in their pride are refusing to do as Jesus did, I would like to read you this letter from our bishop:



Dear partners in ministry,

Grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ.

Across our Episcopal Area, the government shutdown is straining food pantries, increasing demand, and stretching volunteers. Families are arriving in greater numbers, and the threat of SNAP benefit cuts will only deepen food insecurity.

In a recent letter, the Council of Bishops urged our government leaders to set aside partisanship and seek

common ground for the sake of those they serve. We also called on United Methodists to respond with compassion and action.

Jesus said, *“I was hungry and you gave me food”* (Matthew 25:35). This is our call to embodied faith—loving boldly, serving joyfully, and leading courageously, meeting needs hand to hand.

I am grateful for the work already happening. Hundreds of churches in the Susquehanna and Upper New York Area offer and support food pantries where people find not only nourishment, but dignity and welcome.

Now is the time to ACT!

- Organize food drives
- Spread the word in worship, newsletters, and social media
- Take special offerings to buy food in bulk
- Partner with schools, businesses, and other community groups
- Prioritize non-perishables, high-protein items, and shelf-stable goods

Whether your church run a pantry or support one, let us respond with generosity. This is who we are—followers of Jesus, embodying God’s love, with our neighbors in all places.

Together in Christ’s mission,
Bishop Héctor A. Burgos Núñez
Susquehanna & Upper New York Area [UMC]



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/choosing-faith/twentieth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-c-lectionary-planning-notes/twentieth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-c-graphics>

Jesus calls us to serve the Lord with humility, recognizing that before God, we are all equals. Put God first in our hearts and minds, and the rest will follow. If our lives are a prayer before God, what is the attitude of prayer that we are living? What kind of faith do you present to those who observe you?