

Sermon for 2019 Yr C Proper 19
Preached Sunday 09/15/2019 at St. James', Mount Vernon
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There's a delicious irony in today's Gospel. Jesus is hanging out with the undesirables and the outcasts, the sinners and the tax collectors. And they are coming to listen to him, to hear his word of God's love, to feel the balm of forgiveness and to know themselves accepted... and to know this in such a way that their hearts and lives are transformed, into signs of God's love for others as well.

It is the sinners and outcasts who are the ones hearing the Good News, seeing and receiving the blessing of God, the God who seeks the restoration of ALL of His children.

But along come the learned priests and the powerful leaders, the Pharisees and the scribes, and they sniff at Jesus, how inappropriate of him that he should demean himself by sharing the company of those kinds of people.

So Jesus turns to his critics, and tells his parables to THEM. And if they had ears to hear, they would realize that they were being reminded of the importance and value of every one of God's children, and being invited into the joy of regaining what was lost.

But these righteous leaders won't hear, they won't see that Jesus has brought life and love to all these people who had been cut off. They won't rejoice with Jesus, that these sheep who were lost are now found, they won't share in the joy of welcoming them back into the community.

The scribes and Pharisees are focused on their own worthiness... and that makes them judges of others, dividing the world into who is worthy and who is not worthy... worthy as they are! They most certainly would not belong to a club that would accept members such as these.

Even so, Jesus invites the Pharisees—and us—to celebrate and rejoice at God's gift of grace and mercy to others, without regard for our own status. These parables, offered to the Pharisees who have unknowingly and foolishly exiled themselves from God's love and mercy, these parables perform what they teach—they invite the Pharisees to know God's grace themselves, to come in from their self-imposed exile, and to join the celebration of God's goodness.

We are all prone to passing judgement; to some degree we all understand who we are by comparing and contrasting ourselves with others. We are mostly unaware of the ways we judge others. But even as Jesus rejoices at his fellowship with sinners, so we too can extend a holy fellowship and connection to those whom we might otherwise dismiss as not worthy... not worthy of our attention, not worthy of our respect, perhaps even not worthy of the things in life that we may take for granted.

May we count ourselves as fortunate as those sinners and tax collectors who were able to hear Jesus, and find joy in the salvation he brings to all of God's children. For only those who can celebrate God's grace given to others can experience that mercy themselves.

Amen.