

## Exploring the Story in: Luke 18:9-14

### *Reflection*

Today is Ash Wednesday and marks the beginning of this forty-day season of self examination which Christians call Lent. We begin to see the contours of this self examination in Jesus' parable contrasting the haughty words and actions of the Pharisee (assumed to be devout) with that of the humble tax collector (assumed to be sinful). The Pharisee, confident in his own righteousness, separates himself, thanks God that he is not like others - including the tax collector, and closes with a list of his own pious acts. The Pharisee in his misplaced pride and pretentiousness has closed himself off from his own humanity, shows no empathy or compassion for others and thus separates himself from God. The tax collector, on the other hand, opens himself to God, with humility admits his mistakes and asks for God's mercy. With this parable Jesus creates a wonderful reversal, overturning assumptions about these two people, illustrating what it means to be truly faithful and guiding his listeners toward more authentic relationship with God and faithful relationship with others. Like this parable, Ash Wednesday offers us the opportunity to reorient ourselves and to again learn how to live authentic, unpretentious, meaning filled lives with God and with one another. When we receive ashes today and hear the words "from dust you come and from dust you shall return" we are reminded of our mortality—an equalizer which connects us to every living being. Coming face to face with our frailty gives us the opportunity to be humbly honest about who we are, to admit our need for God's gracious mercy and to share that merciful compassion with others. On this Ash Wednesday and throughout Lent may we awaken to life's fragility, open to our own vulnerability, lean into God's compassion and reach out in love to others.

- *The Rev. Sherri Hausser*

## Lectionary Readings

- Morning Ps. 5, 147:1-11
- Evening Ps. 27, 51
- Amos 5:6-15
- Heb. 12:1-14
- Luke 18:9-14

## Prayer

O God, open to us today the  
 sea of your mercy  
 And water us with full streams  
 From the riches of your grace  
 And springs of your kindness.  
 Make us children of quietness  
 and heirs of peace  
 Kindle in us the fire of your  
 love  
 Strengthen our weakness by  
 your power  
 And bind us close to you and to  
 each other.

\*From *The Iona Community  
 Worship Book*

## Lectionary Readings

- Morning Ps. 27, 147:12-20
- Evening Ps. 126, 102
- Hab. 3:1-10 (11-15) 16-18
- Phil. 3:12-21
- John 17:1-8

## Prayer

God of light, shelter us. God of life, help us and keep us from all malice and anguish. God in Christ, shepherd over us and enfold us on every side. Holy Spirit, do not leave or forsake us nor let evil come near us. Amen.

\*Adapted from *The Iona Community Worship Book*

## Exploring the Story in: Psalm 27

### *Reflection*

During Lent, Christians are invited into an extended season of reflection on the state of our lives. For many of us, this reflection brings to the forefront a latent sense of anxiety. For we live in an era of anxiety—worried about the economy, the environment, war abroad, violence at home, our health, our children’s future.

The Psalmist from our scripture reading for today gives voice to such anxieties but in the face of them is also a witness for hope. For in the midst of words of anguish the psalmist cries out in trust and affirmation of God’s care and faithfulness. In so doing, the psalmist gives us permission to honestly and openly share our anxieties with God while inviting us, in the very midst of those anxieties to have faith and trust in God’s care and goodness. For it is in relationship with God that we find our true comfort, strength, and courage.

Today, in the midst of the trials you face, may you open yourself to God, share your worries and fears and in the midst of them have faith that you will “behold the beauty of the Lord” and “believe that (you too) shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.”

- *The Rev. Sherri Hausser*

## Exploring the Story in: John 17:9-19



Sharon Burgmayer, *The Pool of Bethesda*

### Lectionary Readings

- Morning Ps. 22, 148
- Evening Ps. 105, 130
- Ezek. 18:1-4, 25-32
- Phil. 4:1-9
- John 17:9-19

### Prayer

Journey with us, O holy God, as we continue our way to the cross. Sharpen our focus, that our attention may center more on you than ourselves. Remind us that your son prayed on our behalf not because we are deserving of your love and not because we have lived faithfully before your face but because you loved us before we could love you. Lead us through the shadows of darkness and prepare our hearts, that we too might be a people of prayer, ready to perceive and respond to your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

\* From the Worship Sourcebook

## Lectionary Readings

- Morning Ps. 43, 149
- Evening Ps. 31, 143
- Ezek. 39:21-29
- Phil. 4:10-20
- John 17:20-26

## Prayer

O God, give us love enough to make a difference, give us vision enough to follow, give us endurance enough to hold fast in the face of the unholy. Fire us with justice and loose our bonds that we might risk our own security on behalf of others. Amen.

\*Adapted from “Have Mercy on Us” from *Kneeling in Jerusalem* by Ann Weems

## Exploring the Story in: Phil. 4:10-20

### *Reflection*

In 1963, segregation was so brutal in Birmingham that even Dr. King himself could not draw people out to march. But for the children—children ages four and up came pouring out to march by the thousands. Day after day, they marched in nonviolent protest in the face of fire hoses and police dogs. Day after day, by the thousands they came, by the thousands they marched, and by the thousands they were sent to jail. Their tenacity and faithfulness was so powerful that Birmingham officials were forced to desegregate. Where did those amazing children—and where might we—find the strength and courage to face that which is seemingly insurmountable?

The Apostle Paul in his letter to the ancient church at Philippi gives his answer saying, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” and “God will satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in Glory in Christ Jesus.” During this season of Lent, as we examine our lives and open ourselves to God, may we truly believe that—like Paul and the children of Birmingham—we can do all things through him who strengthens us. And may our actions embody that belief.

- *The Rev. Sherri Hausser*