

The Pharisee and the Penitent

Luke 7:36-8:1

The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, June 12, 2016

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

A Pharisee knows the law.

A penitent knows the law.

A Pharisee uses the Law to determine what is the bare minimum necessary to show honor and glory to God. The Pharisee will typically do this by selecting some portion of the law that is relatively easy to keep and make sure that he keeps it meticulously. A Pharisee will make sure that other people know that he is keeping that part of the Law meticulously. His goal is to convince other people that he is a religious and devout person. A Pharisee will ignore the weightier portions of the Law. He will neglect the spiritual aspects of the Law. He will pay no attention to them because he cannot keep them, but because he wants to be justified by the Law he ignores the parts that he cannot keep so that he can convince himself and others and hopefully in his mind God that he has kept the Law and is therefore righteous.

A penitent knows that she has not kept the Law. She has not kept any of it. A penitent person knows all of the Law. She knows the parts that are easy to keep and the parts that are difficult to keep. She knows the letter of the Law and she knows the spirit of the Law. She knows that she has not kept the spirit of the Law. She knows that she has not kept the letter of the Law. It is not that she does not want to keep the Law. It is not that she will ever stop being a sinner. It is simply that she knows that she has not kept the Law. She wants to, but does not do so.

Since a Pharisee will do only the bare minimum necessary in order to keep God's Law the Pharisee does only the bare minimum necessary to show honor to the Lord Jesus. A Pharisee will come to church and attend the Divine Service. A Pharisee will sing the liturgy and the hymns and pay attention during the sermon. At least the Pharisee will make sure that he looks like he is paying attention during the sermon. He does not want anyone to believe that he is ignoring Jesus. He is hoping that if he can convince everyone else that he is a devout person and worships Jesus that this will convince Jesus as well. A Pharisee will go to Communion not that he wants his sins forgiven, but because he knows and sees that it is a religious thing to do and he wants to look religious. He will kneel at the rail. He will do everything that he needs to do in order to appear religious and then he will go home and have relief that he did what he needed to do to look religious. Or some Pharisees even continue their show at home. They pray at home. They may even do daily devotions at home. They give whatever bare minimum praise to Jesus that they can in order to feel that the Jesus thing is taken care of in their lives so that they are righteous before Him so that they can get on with doing whatever it is that they want to do. They want to fulfill righteousness and let it be done so that they may live however they want to the rest of the time. They keep the part of the Law that can be seen so that they can think to themselves that they have fulfilled the Law. He keeps the Sabbath Day, but he does not love his neighbor as himself.

A penitent loves Jesus because Jesus forgives her. A penitent is already aware that she has not kept the Law. A penitent is already aware that she has not kept the Law and she weeps over it. A penitent person therefore loves Jesus because Jesus is the forgiver of sins. Jesus is the divine forgiver of sins. Jesus is the One on earth who has authority to forgive sins. A penitent is so relieved that Jesus is the forgiver of sins that she lavishes her love upon Jesus without thought to anything. A penitent is so relieved that Jesus has forgiven her that she loves Jesus unconditionally above all things. A penitent may not make it to

Divine Service every Sunday, but when she does come she comes for the right reason: to receive the grace and mercy of Jesus. She may miss Communion sometimes, but when she comes she is there to receive the total forgiveness of her sins. She believes that Jesus is there in His body and blood forgiving her of everything and that is why she goes. She never gets tired of going. She does not care who sees her going. She does not care what they think. All she cares about is receiving the grace and mercy of Jesus.

A Pharisee will never admit that he has a sin. A Pharisee will never admit that he was culpable for anything. A Pharisee will keep his sins hidden as best he can so that he does not have to talk about them. A Pharisee will hide his sins under a cloak of righteousness. He will hide his sins from others. He will hide his sins from himself. He will attempt to hide his sins from Jesus. If a Pharisee should get caught doing something wrong, he will always have an explanation for what he is doing. He will always know the Law well enough in order to find a loophole in the Law so that he may justify in his own eyes the sin that he is committing. A Pharisee will have an excuse and explanation or something that he will point to so that he can try to claim that his sin is not his fault. A Pharisee is a hypocrite.

A penitent person will admit all of their sins. They will not flaunt their confession before the community, but neither will they hide their confession from the community. The penitent person thinks to herself, "If going to Jesus for forgiveness means that the community finds out that I am a sinner, so be it." The penitent person is aware that some members of the community already know what she has done. The penitent person is also aware that some people have a misunderstanding of the sins that she has committed and she does not attempt to correct them. The penitent person does not offer excuses or explanations for why she has done what she has done or been what she has been. The penitent person weeps over her sins. She might weep in dramatic fashion or in not so dramatic a fashion, but weep she does. She laments her sins and they grieve her. She wishes that she had never done them. Because of this a penitent person confesses them all. She knows that she could never confess all that she has done, but she confesses what she knows. She knows that she does not have to enumerate all of them, but she knows that because of them she needs Jesus. She is delighted that Jesus has forgiven her. As a result she will do anything for Jesus. She will kiss His feet. She will anoint His feet. She will wipe them with her hair. She will get baptized. She will go to the Sacrament of the Altar. She will search His words because she knows that in them is the word of His grace. Ironically because of the penitent person's enamoration with the grace of her Lord Jesus Christ she forgets herself and winds up keeping more of the Law than the Pharisee does.

The person who tries to be justified by the Law does not keep it, but only does the bare minimum of what he thinks is necessary to get Jesus to like him. The person who knows that she cannot be justified by the Law and turns to the grace of Jesus winds up doing all of it.

A Pharisee will fall into the trap of Jesus. He cannot help himself. And Jesus will set a trap for him. Jesus does not have to be invited over the home of a Pharisee in order to set a trap for the Pharisee. Since Jesus has ascended to the right hand of the Father, He has the ability to set a trap for any Pharisee that He chooses. He uses the Pharisee's own values against him. Since the Pharisee is a hypocrite, he will fall for it every time.

Pharisees are committed to using the Law to judge others. They have such a commitment in order to look righteous. In order to look righteous, however, they must reveal what their judgments of others are. In other words a Pharisee will not keep the judgments that he makes of others to himself. He will reveal to someone, especially to Jesus, that he is making those judgments. By doing so he is hoping that it will make him look righteous.

By doing so the Pharisee leaves himself open to one of Jesus' traps. Eventually Jesus will put the Pharisee in a position where he must render a judgment, but by doing so will reveal to others that he is a hypocrite who does not care for God's Law at all.

It happened to Simon the Pharisee. Jesus told him a parable about two debtors who owed the same money lender. One owed him five hundred denarii and the other owed him fifty. Since neither of them could pay he canceled the debts of both. Then He asked the Pharisee which of the two debtors would love the money lender more. Simon was trapped, but since he was a Pharisee and believed that there was no way that he could possibly be unrighteous in front of Jesus went ahead and answered the question. "The one who was forgiven the larger debt," he said. Jesus told him that he had answered correctly and then proceeded to point out how Simon had not shown any love to Jesus at all. Simon had invited him to dinner, the bare minimum of courtesy, but had not granted the other ancient near eastern courtesies of water for the feet, oil for the head, and the greeting of a kiss. Simon revealed his faithlessness. He was willing to have Jesus over for dinner, but not willing to be forgiven by Him and therefore did not love Him at all. The invitation to dinner was only pretense.

The penitent person does not fall into the trap of Jesus. The penitent person knows that she has not righteousness of her own and is willing to admit that before Jesus. Therefore she is not a hypocrite and Jesus sets no trap for her.

The Pharisee goes home with little forgiven even though he has much to forgive.

Even though she had much of which to be forgiven the penitent person went home with her sins forgiven.

The Pharisee remains in his home condemned by the Lord.

The penitent person returns to her home with a word of peace from the Lord.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.