

SERMON FOR THE DIOCESE OF BUNBURY 19/10/2025: GEOFF CHADWICK
OS 29C SUNDAY BETWEEN 16 AND 22 OCTOBER
“BEING PUT RIGHT”

Luke 18.9-14

Jesus 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.’

Today we are challenged to “put things right” or at least have “God put things right”.

In today’s parable we have Jesus contrasting the actions of a self-righteous Pharisee against a humble tax collector” It’s a deliberate choice, and one not without some controversy.

You see, many people aspired to be like the Pharisees. The Pharisees were considered the “upstanding pillars of society.” They were meticulous in keeping the law, exemplars at worship and well educated. Many would aspire to be as good as them.

Then there are the tax collectors. As workers for the hated occupying forces (the Romans) and less than scrupulous in their dealings, they were despised by the people. No one would aspire to be a tax collector!

And so Jesus, in his usual fashion tells a story where **the right person is doing the wrong thing, and the wrong person is doing the right thing.**

The “pillar” of society (the Pharisee) has got it wrong, and the despised tax collector has got it right!

This story is not only a warning for the people of Jesus’ time, it is also for the early church for whom Luke was writing. It appears that elements of Pharisaism were infecting the church. That is, believers who thought they were setting themselves up as the “finest examples” of Christians, were expecting praise because of it. Sad to say, this is still a temptation in today’s

church, and one we must guard against. Whenever an outsider accuses us of hypocrisy, we know that Pharisaism is not far away!

In our parable, the self-proclaimed righteous Pharisee leaves the temple not “justified.” On the other hand, the self-proclaimed unrighteous Tax-collector leaves “justified.”

Now we need a little clarity around this word “*justified*”. The Greek word is *dedikaiomenos* which derives from a group of words sharing the root *dikaio*.

This is a legal term meaning:

“to be proclaimed just, acquitted of a charge, to be found righteous, or to put right.”

The NRSV, which we heard today, legitimately uses the term “*justified*”, although I’d like to express it as: “*being put right*.”

Being put right.

Have you ever been beside yourself; accused yourself wrongly; or had to change your mind?

Have you ever done the wrong thing by a family member, or friend, or someone else? Have you ever had something niggling away in the back (or even front) of your mind that you know won’t go away until you’ve done something about it?

All of these fit within the realm of *Justification*, or *being put right*.

In our parable, there is a paradox – the Pharisee, who believed he was right in every way, must have his self-proclaimed rightness put right. A dose of humility is what he required!

On occasions I’ve had people come to me seeking confession, or consolation, or advice. In most cases something has been out of place. Stealing; being unfaithful; being bullied.

Accordingly, something had to be restored; something had to be put right. Returning stolen goods; seeking forgiveness, finding courage; and so on.

Now this is where we need to be aware of our own Pharisaism. It's one thing to put things right, and it's another to put things right **to show the word that you are right!** The paradox is this:

When we admit we are wrong or mistaken we are put right!

Once upon a time I was troubled because I thought the meat I had bought from a shopping centre had been stolen from my trolley. After getting home, and not finding the meat, I went back with the docket to the shop where they replaced the meat for free. On getting back home, I discovered the original lot of meat sitting in the sink! I had forgotten I'd put it there! (Before you laugh, have you ever forgotten where you put your glasses?!)

Now I had two lots of meat! What to do?

Troubled by this I went back to the shop to return the second package. The manager, who initially had a look of:

"Oh no, not that idiot again",

suddenly burst into tears when I returned the unpaid goods. I will never forget her comment:

"You are the most honest person I've ever met".

Strangely, it was not just me who had been "put right"; somehow her faith in humanity had been restored – just a little!

So, do you need to put something right?

That's the challenge for this week, and the reward is simple:

¹⁴ [Jesus said] 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.' (Lk 18:14, NRSV)

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.