

## Judgement and redemption

- The Rev Susan Langle

### Luke 18:9-14

Jesus told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 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. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' 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!' 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."

He is a rat! Look at him, who does he think he is standing there! Here of all places. Yes that tax collector is a rat. He is a collaborator, a traitor to his people, to our people. He is collecting for the Man, bringing in revenue for the armed occupation. The soldiers that march through our streets as if they own them would not be here if the gold of this land didn't flow through this tax collector right to Rome. And he doesn't just collect what is owed. He skims off the top something for himself. You know that in his house there is a secret room, a hidden cellar, a locked box that contains his ill gotten gains. He is a rat through and through. And Rats deserve to be killed, not allowed into this holy place. It is a scandal that he even is permitted to utter God's Holy Name. Not only that – he cannot even pray properly. He doesn't stand up and face the Almighty with his hands humbly held open. He curls up, bows down. He says the words of contrition but he cannot face God's wrath. Someone should get the guards and toss this sinner out into the gutter where he belongs. Guard! Guard!

But on the other hand ...

He is a rat! A smarmy, self important, holier than thou rat. See his clothes don't hang loose – he may fast twice a week but I bet he eats meat and drinks wine the other days. He gives a tenth of his income. Ha! I wonder who does his

accounting. I wonder if he declares all his income. I wonder that he has so many investments that even nine tenths of his income leaves him well satisfied, with plenty of time off so he can sashay around the temple and shout out his prayers for all to see, and for us to hear. He thinks he is in good with God but he doesn't even pray properly – not offering God praise, just demanding praise for himself. He is a devious, hypocritical rat. Pond Scum! Someone should tell him to shut up. Guard! Guard!

But on the other hand ...

Don't these two sound like 21<sup>st</sup> century American Christians? Not us of course, but perhaps our cousins in Peoria. Some good God fearing folk profess Christian brotherhood but are quick to condemn others who they don't agree with to the 3<sup>rd</sup> circle of hell. I still cannot get over the vision of crosses along side a gallows on the grounds of the United States Capital on January 6. I still cannot get over the Marjorie Taylor Greene's assertion that Raphael Warnock is not a Christian. I have no intention of getting over the persistent and vicious aggressions by people of faith on Jews because they are Jews.

The roots of Christian White Supremacy are deep and ugly. The tap roots of these sins run into the ground we walk on, literally and culturally and religiously. Beginning with the Mayflower light skinned Europeans came assuming their Christian God given right to subdue the North American wilderness and replace its residents. The descendants of these settlers created a government that enshrined patriarchal control of society and counted enslaved people as 3/5 of a human being. The fight for liberty for all citizens has been our project for the last 200 years and we are not yet close to practicing the promise that all men and women stand equally free and accountable before the law. Though certain contemporary voices claim the Christian faith as inherit in our founding fathers, they were in fact mostly deists rather than Christian and they enacted the first Amendment protecting the freedom of religion, prohibiting the Anglican Book of Common Prayer from becoming the official prayer of our nation.

The lesson from Jesus we hear again today has been cited in the long history of Christian harassment of Jews, harassment leading to pogrom and holocaust. See we are not like them, thus we can kill them. You can filling the blank here with

the hateful lies spoken and acted upon in the persecution of Jews, starting with the Big Lie that the Jews killed our Jesus. This story we read today has been twisted as one more example of us good/Jews bad. But of course the Pharisees, the tax collector, Jesus and most of his early followers were Jews. This story is about Judgement, redemption and grace, grace for us all. White supremacy anchored in a twisted version of what it means to follow the Prince of Peace. White supremacy denies the reality of grace or power or dignity, even life for anyone who doesn't look like, think like, or vote like those who march with tiki torches.

Let it not be so with you, or with me. Let us reaffirm our determination to live our family and spiritual and civic lives committed to justice and liberty for all, and honoring the dignity of every human being. Let us strive to be like our brother Pharisee and our brother tax collector, when they are at their best, trying to be faithful and repentant. How they, and we, respond to God's gracious gift of redemption more than the words we say are what matter most.

There is grace for all us tax collectors and religiously faithful. There is grace for all, Jew or Greek or Sikh. There is grace for us all in this Holy Land that we share with Abenaki and Mohawk. We can strive to be in right relationship with God without passing judgment on another person's or community's spiritual path.

Let us follow Jesus, the Prince of Peace who came offering peace to those who were far off and those who were nearby. Remember Jesus, whose first sermon came from the Scroll of the Prophet Isaiah. Hear again the prophet's admonition about living the words we pray. (Isaiah 58: 6-12)

Is not this the fast that I choose:  
to loose the bonds of injustice,  
to undo the thongs of the yoke,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
and to break every yoke?

<sup>7</sup> Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,  
and bring the homeless poor into your house;  
when you see the naked, to cover them,  
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

<sup>8</sup> Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,  
and your healing shall spring up quickly;  
your vindicator shall go before you,

the glory of the LORD shall be your rearguard.  
<sup>9</sup> Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;  
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.  
If you remove the yoke from among you,  
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,  
<sup>10</sup> if you offer your food to the hungry  
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,  
then your light shall rise in the darkness  
and your gloom be like the noonday.  
<sup>11</sup> The LORD will guide you continually,  
and satisfy your needs in parched places,  
and make your bones strong;  
and you shall be like a watered garden,  
like a spring of water,  
whose waters never fail.  
<sup>12</sup> Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;  
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;  
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,  
the restorer of streets to live in.

My friends, this is the faith that we keep. Amen