

Righteousness, and Rightness
Sunday, October 23, 2022, 10:00 a.m., All Saints Church, Pasadena
The Rev. Mark Chase

All Saints Church, let's just get right into it this morning! We've got a joy-filled generosity party, and a rent control party to get to, I don't have much time so I won't waste time. If we're honest, if I'm honest, this parable of Jesus resonates, because We all know that there are people we wake up thankful, not to be! We all know that there are people who we look to and look at, in order to establish a sense of rightness about ourselves, due to the obvious wrongness about them!

All over this room let's just start with some honesty and confession raise your hands, let's be bold and call it out, let's practice courageous truth-telling, raise your hands, if there are mornings you wake up thankful, just not to be a UCLA Bruin, or like those USC Trojans, or maybe for some us we wake up thankful, that praise be to God, especially with the way they look right NOW...that we're not Los Angeles Laker fans. Maybe you're grateful that you're a Bulldog, and not a Mustang, or a Mustang, and not a Bulldog, or that you went to Blair Or Marantha and avoided all that altogether, I'm from New York, I wake up every day grateful, that I grew up just outside of the Bronx, and not just outside of Queens, otherwise I might be a Mets fan! Please pray for my Yankees. You see, we all intuitively and explicitly understand, that there are people who let us know that we've gotten it right, simply because they've so obviously gotten it wrong.

Can I go a little deeper...Maybe some of us say "thank God we're not one of those people that go to Lake Avenue Church," And parenthetically, there might be some folks at Lake Avenue who wake up and pray, "thank God I'm not one of those people over at All Saints." Some of us we may thank God, especially this time of year, that we're not a Republican...And I know what you're thinking, especially about that last one, "but we're RIGHT, RIGHT?!" But the stunning conviction of this passage would seem to be, that RIGHTNESS, does not equal, RIGHTEOUSNESS! The Pharisee in this parable, had a whoooooole lot, that he was right about. You shouldn't rob people, got that right, you should generally avoid doing evil, got that right, avoiding adultery, got that right, fasted twice a week when by law he was only required to fast once, Got that right, wasn't a tax collector who economically exploited the very community that raised him, got that right, and he gave a tenth of all he made back to his religious institution, we're in the middle of giving campaign, YOU KNOW THAT'S RIGHT! But alllll that RIGHT-NESS, and Jesus said when the eyes of God looked around, she still didn't see RIGHTEOUSNESS....

The Year was 2004, the place was Athens, Greece, and 23 year old archery champion Matthew Emmons, was on his way to an Olympic gold medal. He had so dominated the competition that going into his final shot, all he needed to do, was place his arrow anywhere on the target, and the Gold, was his. He set his sights, took a deep breath, and sent his final shot hurling through the Summer breeze....Bullseye!!!! Someone, had just won. Gold. Only thing is, it wasn't Matthew Emmons. For in the course of all of his aim, and all of his efforts, on that fateful final

shot, he had let his sights wander, and though he'd hit the Bullseye, he had taken aim at the wrong target! ...If you get it early

Friends, could it be that Jesus is telling this story, because he knows the human tendency, to allow our sights to wander, and take aim, at the wrong target! For in the economy of God, the target is not RIGHTNESS, but the target, is Righteousness!!! And The bullseye, on the target of righteousness, is repentance... The Pharisee in our story, had hit the Bullseye, on the wrong target.

Some of us, don't raise your hands just blink, need to repent, of our rightness. Beloved, now is the time to resist the temptation to elbow your partner in the gut....Don't elbow them, just blink at me...Some of us, all the time, are so right, that it's no wonder why we have so few friends LEFT. See what I did there, right, left, but not the direction left....The target in God's economy is not rightness, but righteousness, and the bullseye on that target, is Repentance...

Yo, this November is crucial ya'll, there are lives and liberties at stake, and no not like ever before, because the truth is Black People in America have faced these types of political crossroads year after year, election cycle after election cycle after election cycle, so it's not new, but that doesn't make it any less formidable...We're witnessing, all across the globe, particularly in the West, and certainly here in the U.S. the seductive and brutal pull, of Authoritarian rule and of Fascism. Now Fascism in particular (and I'm gleaning from the work of author and journalist Isabelle Wilkerson as well as author Jason Stanley), Fascism in particular thrives off of a few things, included but not limited to: alternative facts, and alternative realities, everything is true, and nothing is true, all at the very same time, a disdain for academia and intellectuals, and of science itself, a desire and need to keep populations "pure", through a control of who one is and isn't allowed to marry, a story of a glorious and mythic patriarchal past, whose legacy and purity is being threatened by a new group, and lastly, what applies to our context today, inherent hierarchy, an inherent hierarchy that needs natural divisions of "us" vs "them"

FASCISM, needs an us, and FASCISM, needs a them...And Rightness, and Self-Righteousness, like we see in this story, will deliver it up, every.single. Time...

And as Audrey Lorde reminds us so famously, the masters tools, will never dismantle, the masters house. And for the sake of argument let's say that maybe, in some instances they could, the masters tools, will certainly never built anything more beautiful, and more just, and more loving, than what needed to be dismantled, in the first place. And as James Baldwin reminds us, "the trouble that we are in, is greater than we imagined, because the trouble, is in us." So as we resist the fascism OUT THERE, we have to take inventory of the ways in which Fascism may be shaping us, IN HERE!!

In God's Economy, the target is not RIGHTNESS, it's Righteousness, and the Bullseye on that target, is Repentance!

A few weeks ago, I was helping my kids to brush their teeth, and we got a whole routine and a little song that we brush our teeth to, it's a whole thing i'm proud of it we got it dialed in. And on this one particular occasion i'm helping my 4 year old and i'm telling him "Ezzy, make sure you brush in the front buddy, you gotta keep em nice and white." And he pulls out his toothbrush, looks at me and the mirror and says "But Daddy, how come YOUR teeth are yellow???" In other words, I know you ain't talking...What this passage shows us if we let it, is that we all got some yellow....somewhere...

The tax collector says, "God have mercy on me, a SINNER." Now, the language of sinner might not be your favorite, but wether or not it is, isn't the point, the point, that the story lets us in on, is the reality that we are all problematic at some level. Look at your neighbor and say neighbor, did you know you were problematic? It's okay, so am I...we are all problematic at some level.

We all got some yellow! As a Black, Cis-Gedered, Heterosexual Man, I have to name the ways in which i've got some yellow, and have been, and continue to be problematic, towards the progress of other folks of color, Black Women, and my Black LGBTQ siblings. If I don't name those things, and repent of those things, then by default, much of my liberation pursuits, fall short. Because Beloved, i'm not aiming, at least I hope i'm not aiming, just to have Patriarchy, work for me as a Black Man, the way in which Patriarchy, works for white men, I don't want patriarchy to exist, period. And if that's true, then it's not enough for me to say "thank God i'm not like other Black Men, and Male Pastors who "don't get it", i gotta confess, and then repent of the ways in which I still don't get it. I'm still problematic, but I'm also still in progress. And you know just to keep it all the way real, one of the people I most like to thank God, that I'm not like, is my former self. That old me from however many years ago that isn't the me I am now. But one thing i'm learning, is that if we can't hold compassion for our former selves, than it is difficult to hold compassion, for our current selves, for time isn't linear, who we are now, is built on who we were then. And the people we were back then, need love and compassion, just like the people we are right now do. And if we can't hold compassion, for our former selves, then we also can't hold compassion, for anyone who reminds us, of our former selves! Now I am far from a therapist, but The Spirit is blowing in some therapeutic places, there are times when the resentment and judgment we hold for others, is really about parts of ourselves, that we wish never existed. So when we release them from judgment, we simultaneously, release ourselves! Aite session over. For really Therapy, email Showard@Allsaints-pas.org

Where are the places where despite all of our progress, we still need mercy, because we still remain problematic? This is a pivotal question for us a parish, here at All Saints? One that we spent some time answering, as we imagined the future of ALL Saints. Look, it would be real basic, and it would be real easy for us to look at other churches, and thank God, that at least we're not like them, but God isn't calling us to real basic, or real Easy, God is calling us to real Belovedness, and Real Community....

And the goal of that target, is not Rightness, it's Righteousness, and the bullseye on that target, is repentance

. Where are the places where as a church, we need to repent of our Rightness, in order to step more deeply, into God's righteousness?

Now the Good News is, somebody in this story, goes home. Justified, somebody, in this story, goes home, righteous, some body in this story, goes home exalted. White Supremacy, one of it's tenets, is binaries, good bad, us them, and it's tempting to go into binaries about righteousness, as we constantly wrack our brains, trying to figure out, if we should check the box next to Hero or Villain, but the Good News, of this passage, is that it reminds us, that none of us, are wholly Heroes, or Villains, but ALL OF US, are WHOLLY HUMAN, and we are in relationship, with a God, through Christ, who is chomping at the bit, to have MERCY ON US, when we acknowledge, and confess, that Humanity! Amen!

This morning church, I'm so glad, for the Good News of God, In Christ,

I'm so glad, that we're still in process, but God's still got Mercy

I'm so glad, that though our rightness, couldn't save us, Christ's Righteousness, still didn't skip us

I'm so glad, that the power, of the Blood of Jesus, doesn't bow, to the false power, of false Binaries

I'm so glad, that the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, didn't look down and be thankful, just not to BE LIKE US, but loved us enough, to become exactly LIKE US, so that we, might become, exactly, like them!

Amen.