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St. Anne's Episcopal Church, Warsaw  
Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 25)  
October 23, 2022

Lectionary Year C: Luke 18:9-14

In the wake of the Great Resignation, which coincided with the waning of the Covid-19 pandemic and was fueled by people discovering how unfulfilling their "day jobs" were, we have seen increasing numbers of individuals participating in the so-called gig economy. Here, this would apply primarily to those living a nomadic lifestyle and going wherever job opportunities took them. Of course, a lot of these are jobs where only seasonal work is needed -- for example, agriculturally-related industries around harvest time. Recently, I had the opportunity to experience a bit of this with the sugarbeet harvest in northeastern North Dakota; in fact, I was amazed at how many people there weren't from North Dakota but instead from New York, Oregon, and, yes, Indiana! But I'm guessing that, where I finished the harvest and came back here, a lot of them picked up and left for another harvest someplace else.

Those who do this kind of work left, in some cases, high-paying professional jobs that grew increasingly meaningless and unfulfilling as the pandemic dragged on. In fact, the benefits of gig economy work have been noted; they include (1) new challenges, (2) greater work variety, (3) becoming acquainted with new places and different cultures, and (4) virtually unlimited built-in tourism. But, in order to do all of that economically, one must make do with very modest accommodations, such as a minimally-converted Dodge Sprinter van. Those of us who came of age with Chris Farley's "motivational speaker" on Saturday Night Live tend to have rather unpleasant associations with living in a

van, needless to say. Speaking personally, I suppose I'm one of those, too, who tends to see more drawbacks to the gig economy than benefits; I have these bourgeois attachments to things like a permanent address, health insurance, and retirement planning, so I'm willing to sacrifice a bit of adventure and excitement for stability. This is not a judgment on those who enjoy the nomadic lifestyle that the gig economy has brought them; rather, the gig economy simply isn't for me, as a way of life, at least.

And sometimes God calls us to do his work right where we are, so we don't have to go anywhere at all if we don't want to. But, in light of this morning's Gospel text, we remember not to elevate ourselves above those who've discovered ways of answering God's call that are vastly different from ours. No matter how well-intentioned, a prayer that begins with "God, I thank you that I am not like other people" is not for us to pray because, well, who are we to say that we are better than someone else, even if he is a thief, rogue, or adulterer? The same would hold true if he were an itinerant laborer instead of an established, well-regarded executive.

It can't be very easy, either, to find meaning and fulfillment in life with something so vague as "success." One might hope that those who resigned during the Great Resignation found work that, perhaps, made for a less impressive resume but created a happier person -- and maybe the resume has been the only specific measure of the ever-vague "success" for far too long.

But one could say, too, that the Pharisee in this morning's text has the right resume but the wrong stuff; in fact, he gives us a bit of his resume right here by saying, "I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income" (Luke 18:12).

That's all well and good, but were he to truly have the right stuff, he would have the humility to realize that he is, in fact, no better in God's eyes than the people he's comparing himself to. It's not enough to fulfill the minimum requirements and then congratulate oneself for not being like those other degenerates who apparently aren't fulfilling the minimum requirements. In this instance, it's humility that's lacking, and here, humility would mean having sufficient self-awareness to realize that one isn't superior to another simply on the basis of outward expressions of one's religiosity.

Certainly, there's a point where we want to encourage the faithful to "do the right things" -- attend worship, pray, give to the church, et cetera. And in this season of harvest and bringing our first fruits, we're focusing specifically on the time, talent, and treasure we devote to this place. Please continue to prayerfully consider your commitments -- financial and otherwise -- for the upcoming year, and, in addition to that, consider the spirit in which you will pursue those commitments. Hopefully, it won't be solely to make the resume look good; rather, the church seeks people who joyfully give to God a little of what God gave to them, in thanksgiving, above all, for God's gifts of life and salvation...gifts made possible by the one offering of his Son Jesus Christ. Now, Christ bids us to let go of our ego and conceit and do the right thing simply because it's good...not because it'll get us somewhere!

The tax collector in this morning's text, therefore, can serve as an example of the sort of humility that Christ is looking for. Remember that tax collectors back then weren't really comparable to IRS agents; they were loathed not necessarily for what they did but for who they represented. Here, they were agents of the Roman Empire -- reviled particularly for their affiliation with an occu-

pying, foreign government. Most likely, the tax collector knows, too, that he isn't well-liked, so a posture of humility probably comes more naturally to him. And the words that come to him are, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" (Luke 18:13c). Jesus, noting his posture and attitude, then concludes that "all who exalt themselves will be humbled, [and] all who humble themselves will be exalted" (Luke 18:14b).

Things get tricky for us when we consider that we're good people who tend to do good things. We probably don't experience the sort of revulsion that the tax collector experiences, so, therefore, we tend to feel pretty good about ourselves, too. But that should be enough; beyond that, any desire for recognition for the good things we've done reflects an impulse to exalt ourselves. Philanthropy of all kinds presents us with this dilemma; do we donate to charities, organizations, or schools because we want to help them or because we want our name on something? But Jesus steps into this dilemma and allows us to see another way -- the right way -- and tells us that the way of salvation is paved not with our egos but with God's grace. God will give us everything we need as long as we get out of the way and let him do his work.

With stewardship -- as we tend to think about it in the church -- it is helpful to let God do his work with the resources he has given us. Our role in all of this is to discern the ways in which God's gifts might best be given to the church and used in the church's ministries. And perhaps the worst thing we could do here is compare ourselves to some other church and its ministries, either by noting how much better we are than they or by wishing that we could have all the wonderful things they have but don't. So let's think instead of the best thing we could do -- could it be, perhaps, building on our robust tra-

ditions of outreach and hospitality and discovering new opportunities for being a beacon of God's grace to the community? Could it be focusing on the healing of relationships to which Christ calls us through his own ministry of reconciliation? Could it be a wholehearted commitment to both "walking the walk" and "talking the talk" as we offer our time, talent, and treasure in the spirit in which Christ calls us? Could it be something you might add to this list? God has given us so much that the only thing we can do is humbly ask in return, "What can we give back to God?"

Lastly, it might not hurt to remember that all of us have unique ways of answering God's call. Just like life in the gig economy wouldn't work for me but is great for someone else, so too are the gifts that you can bring to this place never identical to your neighbors' -- sometimes what might work for them might not work for you, and vice versa. But God receives all gifts from people like us who know to approach him with humility towards him and compassion towards others. Now, let us go and be the people who have been saved from sin and reborn to new life in Christ -- living, loving, and serving out of the goodness of hearts that have been transformed by him!

Amen.