

+WEEKLY SERMON

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Being right with God

This Sunday morning I am leading an all-age worship service in my church based on the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector and with the theme of 'More of his Righteousness'.

In planning for this service, I have read several resources and watched a couple of animated films of the story. At the end of one video, as the two main characters leave the temple their faces and body language says it all. The Pharisee looks smug and confident but as he glances upwards there is a moment of realisation followed by a troubled look.

However, as the taxman walks through the doorway, he is standing taller as if a burden has been lifted. As he glances upwards he slowly begins to smile, he is relaxed, knowing that in his heart he is right with God.

The picture of that smiling face keeps returning to me. How wonderful to receive that gift of forgiveness and peace from our loving God. The taxman knew he was a sinner who had made mistakes and so he humbly knelt before God and asked for forgiveness. Because of his humility he was restored to being in a 'right' relationship with God.

The Pharisee on the other hand had no sense of peace, forgiveness or relationship with God. His pride of thinking himself better than everyone else was a barrier to receiving God's mercy and righteousness.

Jesus, as always, was cleverly using a story to teach his message and make the listeners think. He was on that occasion directing his message towards those who thought themselves better than everyone else at being in relationship with God. They needed a lesson in humility. Jesus didn't want to tell them that directly, he wanted them to work that out for themselves, so their attitude would change because their hearts had changed.

It is human nature to, at times, think of ourselves as better than others and there is nothing wrong in celebrating our gifts and talents and striving to improve ourselves.

But we need to remember the source of such gifts and blessings, that we are not perfect and that we need to kneel before the one who is perfect and ask for more of his righteousness. Then we will stand taller, and smile, knowing with peace in our hearts that we are Right with our loving God.

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