



NEWSLETTER
The Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost
October 30, 2022
Emmanuel Church
West Roxbury, MA 2022

Fellow Parishioners and Friends,

We welcomed back Fr Jon and the Holy Eucharist this past Sunday. I referred to the lessons and, most particularly, the Gospel and Sermon on our Facebook page this past week. Fr. Jon's sermon spoke a powerful message, that we all need to hear, where Judaism and Christianity meet. But the message also resonates in our current environment as one of the many threats to our always fragile democracy. Anti-Semitism is easy because the "aggrieved party" is so small in number. I could speak for hours on this, but there are many entryways into the collapse of a civil society. There are many targets for hatred.

As Christians it is my belief that we should work to overcome this ancient prejudice. We are brothers and sisters in faith. We share the love and moral guidance of the Old Testament, and we worship one God even as Christians honor the one in three Trinity.

Join us this Sunday at 10am where we can continue to learn from the lessons and gospels of those ancient days. This is the only way to build a bridge strong enough to stamp out those that try to divide us.

Amen.

Terri and Ken, Co-wardens

P.S. We are making Fr. Jon's sermon from last week available in this week's newsletter. See below.

WATCH EMMANUEL VIA YOUTUBE

Missed the in-person service? No problem. You can catch the service, usually posted by Monday evening*, via our website, <https://emmanuelwr.org/> or by going directly to the Emmanuel YouTube site, https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC EQm5KH2wGB_XbZ8h9jldhA

Remember to follow us also on Facebook: [emmanuelwr.org](https://www.facebook.com/emmanuelwr.org)

PRAY FOR UKRAINE



As the war continues to now escalate, we prayer for Ukraine and its people. Our prayers truly help, as they keep us mindful of God's love for us all and the miracles that occur even when all seems lost.

Please consider donating to one of the many organizations raising money for Ukraine. If you prefer to donate directly to an organization focused on helping children in Ukraine, there is Save the Children: https://support.savethechildren.org/site/Donation2?df_id=5746&mfc_pref=T&5746.donation=form1

Another worthy organization is World Central Kitchen a nonprofit founded by Chef José Andrés providing food onsite in Ukraine and to refugees coming into border countries. Learn more at: <https://wck.org/>

СЛАВА УКРАЇНІ!

PRAYER LIST



We pray for this who are homebound or ill: Paul, Mary, Catherine, Michael, Parker, Sergio, Martha, Gail, Anne H, Patricia, Anne J, Barbara., Maureen, Tony, and Edmond.

Please email us the names of those who need special prayers---info@emmanuelwr.org. Only first names will be used.

Fr. Jon's Sermon for October 23, 2002

As a Christian community, we ... we Emmanuel Church, we the Christian Church as a whole, need to be careful about what we read into the characters of this parable we hear today.

For centuries, we've read it as a story about a sinful tax collector who ends up being a secret saint, saved by God's grace, and about the saintly Pharisee, who, in his prayer, makes a public display of his good works but ends up being a hypocritical sinner.

The problem with this reading is that we've both really limited the possibilities of the parable, but also that we open the door to participating in what has been called Christianity's original sin, the sin of anti-Semitism. Now, I hope, I know that we are not taking that step consciously, but the bad news is, that we've got centuries of baggage, and of unhelpful interpretation working against us.

For example, already in the fifth century, in his exegesis of this parable, Augustine was referring to the Pharisee simply as "The Jew," whose righteousness was bound up in strict adherence to the law, and he was referring to the tax collector as the "Gentile" or Christian, who was justified by God's grace.

Augustine probably wasn't the first, but 1000 years later, Martin Luther was still equating the Pharisee with Judaism as a whole, and the Tax Collector with redeemed Christianity. And this kind of interpretation persists to this day. This equation of Pharisee with both Judaism and self-righteousness and hypocrisy is so pervasive that if you Google the word Pharisee today, the very first entry you'll find is a definition that reads: Pharisee, Noun, a member of an ancient Jewish sect, distinguished by strict observance of the traditional and written law, and commonly held to have pretensions to superior sanctity. A self-righteous person; a hypocrite.

We also hear this word, Pharisee, used frequently in political discourse, relying on negative stereotypes, rather than what the parable, or for that matter, other historical sources of the period, actually, have to say, which is all deeply problematic.

We need to remember that this is a parable, a story, and that both characters are caricatures... and that Jesus chose them specifically to shock his first century audience, to draw their attention to the story. They would have been shocked by the complexity of this tax-collector, this person who was considered a traitor to his own people, and who lined his pockets with their wealth, yet was somehow also deeply repentant. Just as they would have been befuddled by a Pharisee who was so dismissive of the community around him ... thank God I am not like those people.

To the majority of Jesus' audience, Pharisees were understood to be respected teachers. They were the practical theologians of their day, who were known to walk the walk of their teachings, who rather than being dismissive, lived-in accordance with Torah as a way of making God's benefits visible to the community and whose practices encouraged them to be always mindful of their relationship with God. The first century historian, Josephus, credits Pharisees with interpreting the Torah in a way that made it accessible and relevant to the society of the day.

So, this is all to say that this parable comes with a lot of baggage, and believe me, I've barely scratched the surface, but it is dangerous baggage that, particularly as a Christian community, we need to begin to strip away if we are going to be able to really wrestle with what to take from it.

If you haven't heard of Dr. Amy Jill Levine, you should look her up, she is a self-described, "Yankee Jewish feminist who teaches (New Testament) in a predominantly Protestant divinity school (Vanderbilt) in the buckle of the Bible Belt." As you might guess, she is quite a character ... and she has made it her ministry to help Christian Pastors to free themselves from some of this baggage, particularly in their preaching and teaching. Her book, *Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi*, was incredibly helpful in my own reading of this parable.

So ... let us move forward with caution, and to paraphrase Dr. Levine, let us remember that if our good news means making someone else look bad, then it's not really good news. So, a few things to point out about the parable ... First, the obvious, that everyone involved in this story: Jesus, his audience, the Pharisee, and the tax collector would have counted themselves as Jewish. And as for his audience, Luke tells us that Jesus told this parable "to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt," and it is important to note that in Luke's narrative, this is part of a longer discourse to his disciples, to his closest followers ... so he was addressing an internal issue. And he addresses it by pointing out that negatively judging others is not a trait of any particular sect or group or religion, but a human trait that even we, we followers of Jesus, are all susceptible to.

Now, as with most parables, there is a lot going on in this one, but that point, about judging others, is worth exploring ... I think that Jesus is addressing it because he recognized how damaging it could be within this new, formative community, but also damaging in terms of creating a community that would be compelling, that might become something beyond what it is in this moment.

Remember that the Pharisee is righteous, he does a lot of good things and lives in a way that he believes is an expression of his covenant with God, but he gets into trouble when he sees his neighbors with such contempt. He puts himself in a position of deciding who is beyond God's Grace and Mercy. And Jesus knew that one of the defining characteristics of the movement he was starting needed to be faith in the idea that no one, not tax collector, not Pharisee, not Jew or gentile, not priest or layperson, not sinner or saint, not annoying or frustrating, not those on a different end of the political spectrum, not any of these, is beyond God's Love. May we continue to live in the faith, that no one is beyond God's love, may we become examples of that Love, and may our Good news be good news for all. Amen.