

"What Are You Doing Here?"

Text: Luke 18:9-17

May God the Father grant you the grace both to recognize your purpose in life and to center your entire existence around that "one thing needful." Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians: The written word tends to conjure up images based on the hearer's experience with those words. If you hear a phrase spoken a certain way often enough, you tend to read that phrase accordingly. Take the sermon theme for this morning. How did the question sound in your ears when you read it? What word did you naturally emphasize? Because it is often used that way, many would naturally emphasize the fourth word – "What are you *doing* here?" If "The Piano Man" happened to be playing in your head, you might have naturally emphasized the third and fifth words – "What are *you* doing *here*?"

It makes a difference, doesn't it? It's a completely different question when you emphasize different words. This morning we are going to do just that as we apply this question to our text. We are going to emphasize different words, and in so doing we will attempt to open our hearts to understand the inspired words of our text more fully, and to apply them more accurately.

The text that we will thereby explore this morning is found in the 18th Chapter of St. Luke's Gospel, beginning there with the 9th verse:

ESV **Luke 18:9-17** *He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt:* ¹⁰ *"Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' ¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."* ¹⁵ ¶ *Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. ¹⁶ But Jesus called them to him, saying, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. ¹⁷ Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."*

So far the very words of God. May God the Holy Spirit give each of us a wise and receptive heart so that we accept these as the words of God alone, and utilize and treasure them accordingly. To this end we pray, **"Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!"** Amen.

Has anyone ever asked you our theme question this morning, emphasizing the fourth word - "What are you *doing* here?" This morning I want you to ask it of yourself. You are here, right now, in church; but "What are you *doing* here?" In other words, why are you here? What was your reason for coming and what exactly did you hope to accomplish?

If the question had been asked of the two men in our text – assuming they would have answered honestly – we would have heard two very different answers. We need to examine both the positive and negative of our text. If we are to learn what to run from and what to run to, we need to get a handle on the evil against which our text is warning and the good we are supposed to imitate or embrace.

The Pharisee, if asked, would have been forced to give a spectacularly idiotic answer: *"I am here to tell God just how wonderful I am."* That is, after all, exactly what he was doing, wasn't it? He was pointing out to God just how special he was. It's actually rather a challenge to wrap our minds around just how absurd was his whole purpose for being in the temple. For starters, man doesn't need to point anything out to God – either his faults or his imagined virtues. God knows. Second, man's opinion or perception of his own value and goodness does nothing for God. God is not persuaded by man's narcissistic delusions. Nevertheless, if asked, the Pharisee would have been forced to answer: *"I am not here to receive anything, for I currently lack nothing. I am here to give God the information that he needs to know about me. I am here to make sure that God knows just how special I really am."*

Only God wasn't listening. In fact the translation we are using this morning (the ESV) could have done a better job translating one of the key verses of our text. Verse 11 should read, *"The Pharisee, to himself, prayed this..."* It really didn't matter whether or not the work-righteous Pharisee *thought* he was "praying" to God. The reality was that he wasn't. Because he couldn't. He didn't have access. We are told repeatedly in Scripture that God does not hear the prayers of the unbeliever. In fact that is one of the incredible privileges or benefits of discipleship that Christians tend to take for granted: the assurance that God has promised to hear our prayers. The godless have no such

advantage. Isaiah 59:2: "***Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.***" John 9:31: "***We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him.***" Isaiah 1:14-15: "***Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them.*** ¹⁵ ***When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.*** No matter then what the Pharisee *thought* he was doing, the reality was that he was talking with himself. He was talking to the air.

Understand that that's not what the Pharisee thought. He undoubtedly *thought* he was talking to God, which just makes what he was saying all the more absurd. It makes absolutely no sense *unless* you stop to consider the man's religious convictions. The Pharisees were offended by the notion of a Savior from sin – precisely because they believed they *had* no sin. They were willing to acknowledge the need for a savior from Rome, since not even they could deny the reality of their Roman overlords, but the idea of a Savior sent from God to pay their sin debt was an affront to them. It's important to note in our text not only what the Pharisee said but what he didn't say. What he didn't say was, "*Forgive me.*" In his mind he had nothing to forgive. That's also why he wasn't in the temple looking for something from God; he was there because he believed in his own obedience, and that obedience included regular visits to the temple. He wasn't there to receive. He was there, if anything, to earn.

Not so with the tax collector. He was there precisely because he recognized that he had nothing whatsoever to give to God. He came because he recognized that he had a problem for which he could offer no solution. He was a sinner, and he knew that there was nothing he himself could do to fix that most serious of all problems. Because he recognized that he had nothing to offer God, nothing to give, he came praying to receive.

In fact here again the ESV translation let us down with a poor translation that actually masks one of the gems in this text. The prayer of the tax collector was not, "***God, be merciful to me, a sinner!***" It was, "***God, be merciful to me, the sinner!***" While the Pharisee was busy favorably comparing himself to others, the tax collector compared himself only to God's perfect standard of conduct – which is all that really matters. It didn't matter to the tax collector if there were better or worse sinners out there. What mattered to him was his relationship to his God. So it was

that he didn't seek to hide his sin-problem from God by approaching him as just another face in that world-wide crowd of sinners. He stood alone before his God – as *the* sinner.

And it was he, not the self-righteous Pharisee, who returned to his house justified – declared by God himself to be not guilty of sin. This is astounding when you stop to consider. The tax collector had come with nothing but the acknowledgment of this sin, and yet it was he, not the Pharisee, that was declared to be not guilty. The tax collector came looking for something from his God that he knew he could not provide, and he received it. The Pharisee came to give something to God, and left with only his sin and unbelief.

So we turn the question on ourselves, emphasizing the third word in the question – you: "What are *you* doing here?" Are you, in other words, here today to fulfill an obligation ("*I really don't want to go to church but I have to*")? Are you here to offer something to your God (other than, of course, your thanks and praise) or to receive something from him? Are you here as just another sinner, or as *the* sinner?

It makes a big difference, doesn't it? Those who come looking, find, and return to their homes with the comfort of justification and forgiveness. Those who come to tell God how great they are, or who come to earn God's favor by their coming, leave with their sin.

By God's grace we have come to stand like the tax collector – alone before our God. We've come with nothing in hand, nothing to give or offer a holy God. We stand with heads bowed in the shame of our sins and the utter impossibility of ever helping ourselves.

And we return to our houses with the sweet assurance of complete forgiveness filling our hearts. Because God himself has declared it to be so. The fact is, as we are reminded in our text, all those who cast themselves in abject humility at the foot of the cross – trusting that Jesus there provided what they could not – all such receive full and complete pardon from our God. All such are lifted up and declared by God himself to be righteous in his sight.

And do not, by the way, think for a moment that the second half of our text has nothing to do with the first, as though God the Holy Spirit through Matthew ended one thought only to begin another. In fact it is the second half of our text that gives added clarity to the first. By including the account of those who brought little children to Jesus here, the Holy Spirit provides us yet another vantage point of the same

lesson or truth he was teaching in the parable.

You know the setting. Parents were bringing their little ones ("infants" is a good translation here) to Jesus so that he might bless them. His disciples tried to turn them away, no doubt because they felt such things were beneath the Savior or just a waste of his valuable time. Jesus, on the other hand, used the occasion to draw an ever clearer picture of the sort of heart that he wants to find in his children, young and old. Little children are themselves burdened with sin. They are born with it. What they are generally not burdened with is the arrogant misconception that they themselves can supply what is lacking. Little children naturally recognize their role in life as those who receive, as those who are provided for, as those who cannot help themselves but must be helped by someone else. Little ones don't work to earn. They are therefore well accustomed to the very thing that the Pharisee in Jesus' parable found so repellant: the acknowledgement that they are in dire need of that which they themselves cannot provide.

This is, in fact, exactly what it means to **"receive the kingdom of God like a child."** Here our translation did us a service by using the word "like" rather than "as." To **"receive the kingdom of God as a child"** is often misunderstood to mean that if we don't become Christians when we are little children, we are lost. What Jesus is rather saying is that if we do not receive it like a little child receives it, we cannot be saved. And just how does a little child receive it? Just like the tax collector did – as an unearned gift from God.

Two more times we must ask ourselves our question, first emphasizing the fourth word – "doing": "What are you *doing* here? Having come with nothing to offer to a holy God but our sin and shame, what we ought to be doing here is, first of all, hearing and believing his incredible pronouncement that every single one of our sins has been forgiven. They have been rendered, one and all, forever inadmissible in the court of Judgment Day. Nothing and no one can ever use them to accuse us. They are gone forever, the penalty having been paid in full by Jesus Christ. What we should also then be *doing* here is worshipping our God – singing his praises with pure and absolute joy and relief filling our hearts.

And then finally we ask the question once more, emphasizing the last word – "here": "What are you doing here?" Why is that you are here, in this place, at this time, and not somewhere else? I pray God the answer has nothing to do with the building or the people or the pastor, and everything to do with the fact that here is God's Word – the pure bread of life every sinner so desperately needs.

God grant each of us the simple, humble, repentant heart of the tax collector, along with the pure sweet forgiveness, peace, and comfort that were also his. Amen.

ESV **Genesis 4:1-15** Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD." ² And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. ³ In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, ⁴ and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, ⁵ but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. ⁶ The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? ⁷ If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it." ⁸ ¶ Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. ⁹ Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" ¹⁰ And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. ¹¹ And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. ¹² When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth." ¹³ Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. ¹⁴ Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me." ¹⁵ Then the LORD said to him, "Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him.

ESV **2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18** For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing...¹⁶ At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! ¹⁷ But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. ¹⁸ The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

ESV **Luke 18:9-17** He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ¹⁰ "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' ¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." ¹⁵ ¶ Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. ¹⁶ But Jesus called them to him, saying, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. ¹⁷ Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."



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The 20th Sunday after Pentecost – October 23, 2022

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 2 (Stanzas 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"To Thy Temple I Repair"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Genesis 4:1-15) How far and how rapid was the fall of man. While Eve may well have thought her first child to be the Savior promised in the Garden of Eden, Cain turned out to be anything but. Not only was the first man born to woman a murderer, note also how he actually *complained* to God about his punishment. Recognize those same tendencies in your own heart and take to heart the Lord's warning: "**Sin is crouching at the door.**"

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 146 (Page 41) Read Responsively

The Gospel Lesson: (2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18) Note, first of all, the absence of self-pity in Paul – though, unlike Cain, he was suffering unjustly. His only crime was the spreading of the life-giving gospel. Compare his words and attitude to those of Cain, the murderer. Note also Paul's resolve, which was to continue faithful to that Word of God until God called him home. God grant us such faith.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – (Brown Hymnal page 15)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 43 (Red Hymnal)

"We Sing the Almighty Power of God"

The Sermon – Text: Luke 18:9-17 (Printed on the back page)

"What Are You Doing Here?"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Prayers

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 27 (Red Hymnal)

"Oh Bless the Lord, My Soul"

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 52 (Red Hymnal)

"Almighty Father, Bless the Word"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here!
To our Visitors seeking Holy Communion – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

Attendance – Sunday (45) Average (33)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
	-11:30 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting

CLC News – Ascension of Tacoma and Redemption of Lynnwood have called Pastor Joe Naumann to serve both congregations.

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is scheduled to meet next Sunday during the fellowship hour.

2023 CLC Mission Helper Trip – Applications are being accepted for the 2023 Mission Helper Trip to Nepal. Space is limited for this trip so please apply early. Find more information at: <https://mht.lutheranmissions.org/>

Christmas Flower Order – Please fill out the form on the mailbox table if you are interested in ordering Christmas flowers this year. See Sandy Roehl if you have questions.

Joint Reformation Service – Our annual Joint Reformation Service is scheduled for next Sunday, October 30th at Our Savior's in Jamestown. The service is at 6pm with a fellowship meal to follow.

Holy Communion – Although originally scheduled for today, Holy Communion has been rescheduled for next week. Private communion is always available by request.