

[Luke 18:9-14](#)

The pharisee and the tax collector

(Jesus commends another crook!)

On the surface this shapes up as being something to do with prayer and a lesson on humility (and yes it can be ... I'll come back to that.)

Mental note: **this is a parable**. As such, we should be alert for the twist that it is sure to be buried in the story somewhere.

Here is a summary of the situation: All things considered, the Pharisee is a good man. He is committed in fulfilling his religious obligations. He is regular in his visits to the temple and gives the prescribed share of his wealth to "the church". The tax-collector however is a crook. He rips people off. He is an agent of the Roman Government and while collecting money for them, he stuffs a bit more in his own pocket.

Shouldn't we be able to give the Pharisee some credit here? Surely the Pharisee is closer to God than the tax-collector? If that's our thinking, we make the same mistake as the Pharisee in which case, this might as well be the present-day parable of *"The pious Lutheran and the corrupt Business Manager"*.

It seems to me that the parable, aimed at the Pharisees, was primarily about the futility of religion - religion in the sense that it convinces us to do stuff in order to gain favour with God. Jesus has found yet another way to put into a story setting, the fact that the only thing that God requires of us is to trust Jesus. The tax collector through his words of confession has done that very thing. (By the way, in the eyes of the Jews, tax collectors were on a par with Samaritans. The Pharisees would have believed that tax collectors could not possibly get to heaven.)

The good thing is that since we view this story with a full understanding of what Jesus has done for us to make us OK with God, we do not have to have any fears about where we stand. It's a done gospel deal!

So what can we draw out of this for us in Lutheran schools today?

Aside from the obvious repeating message of the simplicity of the gospel, perhaps a good place to start is by **not** subtly and sub-consciously thanking God that we are **not like** either the Pharisee or the Tax collector! If we have even a hint of that thinking as we reflect on this parable we are in trouble. This self-righteous line of thought can come in surprising forms. One of which for example can play out right under our noses without even being aware of it – for example by giving the impression that we are better than the state school, kindy or child-care centre down the road. Which brings us to **HUMILITY** (one of our Lutheran education core values). The paradox of humility is that the more intensely we pursue it, the more illusive and distant it becomes. To think we have humility is a sure sign that we don't! That perhaps leaves us to conclude that there is nothing we can do to gain humility. But there is something we can do. It's called service. We might even call it secret service. Instinctively serving others, out of response to what God has done for us, seeking nothing in return and not blowing our trumpet about it, leads us to a growth in humility without even realising it.

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