

# St. Andrew's Episcopal Church

October 27, 2013

## Sermon: Capt. Timothy Eichler, USN

Let us pray, *Gracious Heavenly Father for this day and for the opportunity to gather in your name we give you thanks and praise. thank you for feeding us with your word and later on feeding us with your son's body and blood that we may be strengthening truth and might and in spirit. Lord as we come now to meditate upon your word may the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord our rock and are redeemer amen. please be seated grace mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ , Amen.*

In the reading of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, there's a question that comes to mind that I'd like to ask each and everyone of you. Are you a pharasee or are you a tax collector? Are you a pharasee or are you a tax collector? And as you think about whether you are a pharasee or a tax collector, there are four quotes that I want you to reflect upon as well. And see how you hear yourself in those quotes or see yourself in those quotes. Do you see yourself as a pharasee or do you see yourself as a tax collector? First quote: *"but we have to pass the bill so that you can find out what is in it away from the fog of controversy."* *"There's a power outage at the department store yesterday twenty people were trapped on the escalator."* *"For great Britain, we spend billions of pounds on welfare yet millions are trapped on welfare. It's not worth their while going to work."* And from Paul's letter to the Romans, *"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do."*

Pharasee or Tax Collector? Or to think about it a little bit more, we think about the Pharasee and the Tax Collector from Luke's Gospel this morning. One word comes to mind, trapped. You ever feel trapped? You ever feel like you get into a situation you cannot get out of? How about something you bought? Do you ever have buyer's remorse? Or that wonderful outfit or something that you bought that the salesperson said *oh this is the best thing you could ever wear* and then you get home and you put it on? Or you get your hair done, ladies, and you come home and somebody the household, or you know maybe your spouse, turns to you and goes *my God would did you do? Oh I didn't mean it negatively, it's just a big change.* But you feel trapped. Nowhere to go, no options out there, you just feel stuck on an escalator. This is an escalator of life.

The parable this morning from the Gospel is pretty straightforward. It's clear but the hypocritical Pharisee would rather think of yourself. Like the self of basing humble tax collector, be humble. But as you think about that story is that the rest of the story? Is that all there is? Is that all there is in that story? The humble? Both the Pharisee and a Tax Collector called upon the Lord. Remember the Pharisee, the Pharisee truth be told only speaks the truth. He is righteous. He has fulfilled the law. He leads a life blameless according to the law. He fasts, he gives a tenth of his income, he indeed bears no resemblance to anybody that unsavory in particular that tax collector. That not only collects the taxes but has probably collected more than what he should have. He sticks a little extra in his own pocket or maybe he twisted somebody's arm to make sure they paid double tax. He was not the most upright standing citizen in the time. So it compares himself to others. But then as his problem, it narrowed down to one thing... while he was right about the kind of life he should live, he is confused about the source of that life. He talks about how we should live it but he doesn't understand where it comes from. For while he prays to God, his prayer if you look at it closer is all about himself. Right? Look it up. *Look at me God, how could you find me guilty?* Look here it is, right? *And you know, not only do I obey all the laws that are out there, I even give ten percent of my money. Just like you say.* But for this reason we're told, he leaves the temple as righteous accorded the law but not justified before God. Because he has never asked to be justified before God because it's never crossed his mind. Because all he can say is *look at me.*

Now lets take a look at the tax collector. Humble comes before the Lord and says *Lord, I'm going to go stand over here in the corner and I'm beating my breast and Lord to look at me a lowly center.* Simple acknowledgment it is utterly and entirely dependent upon God's mercy. But if you notice, there is something missing with the tax collector. Do you know what's missing with the tax collector? To catch it, there is no repentance on his part. He says he's the sinner but there's no turning about his life. Does he say *I'm going to quit being a tax collector?* Does he say *I'm going to quit taking things that I shouldn't take from people via tax collection?* **How about,** *Ya I've taken more than I should've?* **Is there any** *I'm going to go give it back to those? Or give it to the to the city Treasury or whatever it take care of others.* No, he just says Lord I'm a sinner and now I'm going to go back to living life the way I'm living. And there's no change in his life. He's humble but yet no change. He recognizes that he's wrong but he doesn't really change his position where he stands.

Both of them, both of them, are trapped. Trapped in the minute that we take the parable seriously, for you and I, we're asking *are you trapped?* And where do you see yourself? And maybe we all like to go align ourself with the tax collector and we say oh look how humble I am. Wait a minute, that sounds like the Pharisee? And it's trapped, over and over again in life situation. We can't seem to get out of it. The parable shifts our attention from ourselves. From the Pharisee who focuses on himself. For even if

we take the tax collectors position who is focused on himself, the focus upon God. And what God has done for you and for me in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. How God comes to delight, and justifying, and welcoming each and everyone of us. So then how do we escape the trap that we set for ourselves? How do we escape the trap of the lives that we live? How do you get out of it?

Several months ago one of our next-door-neighbors is over with some other neighbors and we're sitting in the backyard and we had some burgers on the grill and we're having a good time. And our one neighbor, we've been there two and a half years, and we know...we know her...you think you know your neighbors some what well right? And as she is sitting there telling this story, we know her husband was a naval aviator. He had died in 1990 and probably in an airplane accident, she hadn't shared that I ended up looking it up later, but he retired from the Navy and they had a pretty good life. He flew airplanes that is what we knew. What we didn't know, she shared that evening very briefly, was that he was shot down over Vietnam. Didn't know that she shared was that he was shot down but didn't know if he was dead or alive for two years. She was trapped for two years, not knowing the status for her spouse. How do you live in that? How do you escape that trap? Trapped, not knowing that fate and yet you still have two children home to care...If you listen to her today, she shared with me the other day as I took her to the airport, she shared every single day because they lived on base, she'd hear the call to daily mass. She's a very faithful Roman Catholic. She went to mass every single day. She said she didn't even change clothes, she said "I'd get up out of the garden go." Every Sunday she went to my mass. What she did since and even since then she goes to mass every Sunday. What she did is she went and took her trapped... where she was trapped... and laid it at the foot of the cross. She went and laid it where it belongs and said "I'm trapped I can't get out of it, the best I can do is give it to you." That's what she did. At about two years she found out her husband was alive but for the next four years until they are reunited in 1975, he spent a total of about six, six and a half years, in that [ ]. And she had sixteen letters from him during her time which she still to this day. She treasures those letters but she treasures more when you talk to her and you listen to her very quietly. In going to worship and laying things at the foot of the cross.

Now her husband was trapped as well, a different type of trapped a different type of captivity. And you wonder how do you escape that kind of captivity and she shared what he did was he did two things. First thing he did was the foil out of the cigarette packages he saved. What are you going to do with foil from cigarette packages? What he did with the foil is he fashioned them into a small cross that he carried in his pocket the whole time he was in captivity. He in fact brought it back with him and then because he did get pencil on paper was able to write letters home periodically he saved some of that in the scriptures and things that he can remember from worship he wrote down and held on to those and prayed with those. He created his own scriptures or Bible as

it were based off of his education and training from being in Church all those years. Some very simple things we may take for granted he took and used then laid at the foot of the Cross. That sustained him through those years at captivity. For this young couple their faith in Christ, their faith in what God promises us, went and took and laid it at the Cross of Christ. In being trapped in what many of us may not ever be able to imagine what it was like, they've laid it at the Cross of Christ. For you and I what we can do, where we're trapped in which you do daily is lay it at the Cross of Christ. You lift it up in prayer and let it rest there. Take it off your shoulders and put the burden where it belongs, to Jesus. In one way or another, many of us will always be trapped. There will always be times when we will focus upon ourselves or situations or things that we have gotten into, the answer to the current situation is more so than ever Jesus. And let it reside there. We may never get that full peace and comfort that we want but there is that peace that comes with laying it at the Cross of Christ. Jesus knows and gives us that way to endure, in worship here in the morning, in prayer, in evening prayer during the week and celebrating. Joel speaks to that today. Joel says to us and to the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, when we are trapped to call upon the name of the Lord. Joel reminds us that whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. Come let us call upon the Lord and lay our thoughts and words and deeds at the foot of Christ. Come let us crawl with Jesus like Theotokos, the icon of Christ crawls into his mother's lap. Let us crawl in to God's waiting arms, to embrace us with his love as we are trapped. Come let us call upon the Lord and rest in the mystery of the body and blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ this morning in the Eucharist. Come let us call upon the Lord, to God be the glory now and forever. Amen.