

PRAYER OF WHO WE ARE - A reflection on Luke 18: 9-14

Nicola God hears all kinds of prayers ...

Once there were two men who went up to the Temple to pray:
one was a Pharisee, the other a tax collector.

The Pharisee stood apart by himself and prayed.

Peter I thank you God that I am not like everyone else:
I am not greedy,
I am not dishonest,
I am not an adulterer.
I thank you God that I am not like that tax collector over there.
I keep your laws,
I fast two days a week,
I give you a tenth of my income.

Nicola The tax collector stood at the back of the temple, far away from
the Pharisee. He was afraid to raise his face to heaven so he
looked at the floor and beat his breast and cried.

Philip God, have pity on me a sinner.

Nicola: God hears all kinds of prayers.

(Pause)

Once there were two people, a man and a woman, who went
into a church to pray. The man walked slowly up the middle
aisle, admiring the banners, the newly refurbished building and
the polished pews. Giving an approving glance at the building,
he settled himself down in the front pew and, after a few
moments, began to pray.

Alan: Thank you God for this beautiful church, I really appreciate it.
I love coming in here to pray.
You know me, God,
I do my best to live a responsible life.
I have a good job.
I am not in debt and I fill in my tax returns correctly and on time.
I have a good wife.

I am faithful to her and I make sure that she and our children are well cared for and are a credit to me.

Whenever possible we eat fair trade food and we drink fair trade coffee and tea.

It tastes a whole lot better than it used to ...

I am willing to give money to good causes –

as long as I have satisfied myself that my money is being put to a good use and is not being squandered.

Anything we no longer need and all our unwanted things are taken to the Salvation Army shop.

I am a good person.

Nicola

A woman crept into the back of the church and sat down in a side pew, behind a pillar. Her eyes were full of tears.

Her day was not going well. The debt collectors had arrived early demanding money, her boyfriend had stormed out of the house saying that he had had enough and he wasn't coming back. Her children would be home from school soon and she'd promised them money tomorrow so that they could go on a school trip next week. She'd not been able to face going into work today, but she'd have to go in tomorrow or she'd lose her job.

She'd not prayed for a long time, but she needed help and maybe God might hear her; so she buried her head in her arms and prayed ...

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Help me, God.

I'm sorry, God.

Please, God, help me ...

Nicola

God hears all kinds of prayers ...

And God says:

Those who think themselves important will be welcomed and humbled; and those who face the truth about themselves will be welcomed and helped.

I invite you to turn to those around you and consider the following questions:

What is your imagined picture of a Pharisee or a tax collector?
What reinforces the Pharisee in you?
(Share your thoughts and feelings)

Nicola

Prayer is an act of openness.
When we pray, we participate in the ultimate practice of humanness as we yield to a power greater than ourselves. Our best prayers engage in candor about our lives, practice vulnerability, run risks, and rest in confident trust'.

Silence

We are your people,
 Mostly privileged
 Competent
 Entitled.
Your people who make future for ourselves,
 seize opportunities,
 get the job done
 and move on.

In our self-confidence, we expect little
 Beyond our productivity;
 we wait little for that which lies beyond us,
 and then settle with ourselves at the center.

And you, you in the midst of our privilege, our competence our entitlement.

You utter large, deep oaths beyond our imagined futures.
You say – fear not, I am with you.
You say – nothing shall separate us.
You say – something of a new heaven and new earth.
You say – you are mine; I have called you by name.
You say – my faithfulness will show concretely and will abide.

And we find our privilege eroded by your purpose,
 Our competence shaken by your future,
 Our entitlement unsettled by your other children.

Give us grace to listen to the silence
Give us grace to hear your promises.
Give us freedom to trust your promises.
Give us patience to wait and humility to yield our dreamed
future to your large purpose.

We pray in the name of Jesus who is your deep *yes* over our
lives.