



## ***Waterrow Worship Sept 2010 – Talk***

***"Lord, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight"***

The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector is one we probably all know very well. The story of two men who went up to the temple to pray.

The righteous people, the ones that were overly confident of their own righteousness, were compared to the Pharisee. He was a religious zealot he went to church frequently, prayed regularly and fasted at least once a week. And yet he was not justified before God and he wasn't exalted. He did the right things but he was overly righteous in what he did and spent so much of his time talking about it that he forgot the most important thing. He forgot to ask for mercy. He was too good for that.

We are all guilty of this. We spend so much time being busy and living our lives even those lives that are incredibly religious and hard working and ethical and passionate that we forget what is important. Which is to stop and ask for salvation. To figuratively bend our knee before God and realise we are still not worthy without God's grace.

It is however a difficult balance and it must have been very difficult for those people that were being told this story by Jesus. They clearly didn't want to be like the Pharisee anymore they therefore had to become the tax collector.

We have to remember that tax collectors then aren't like tax collectors now, he was a crook. He was a Jew working for the Roman government and was given an area in which he was entitled to collect taxes. He knew what he had to collect to pay them and anything else he made over and above that was his bonus. And these weren't the odd pennies here and there, we are talking big bank managers type bonuses.



Not surprisingly they were considered traitors working for the occupiers of their country and lining their own pockets. Jesus has set this parable up as a comparison between a Pharisee one of the most respectable people of his time and this traitorous tax collector – a mafia style enforcer, the rotten apple.

It must have been a terrible shock for the people to be told that this was the better man. But he was because he humbled himself, despite his faults he admitted he had them, to ask for salvation and for Jesus' forgiveness.

Its very easy when talking about life to fall into this trap my life is incredibly busy. I work more than a 9 to 5 hour job. I don't get any breaks during the day and then come home to a mad house of two very active children.

We then share the joy of putting them to bed before we do the things that we enjoy doing in the evening be it community based, church based or less frequently than I would like hobby based. We sometimes also watch television!

Its easy to feel good about ourselves when talking to people about what I do and how much of my time it takes proving therefore that I am a good Christian.

Its easy to feel that we have so little time to stop during this time of busyness that we don't get round to stop pray, reflect and ask for salvation. This however is falling into the Pharisee trap. Although I don't feel I am really righteous about it and lord it over everybody what a good Christian I am, it is true that taking time to stop and humble ourselves before God rarely happens.

It is great (I hope) that we do these things but if we do not enter Gods house and ask for salvation then it is lost. The stuff that goes with it isn't the solution it is part of the solution it cannot save you alone.



Sometimes we get so tied up with doing the stuff that forms part of and develops the solution that we forget about the bigger picture. The stuff is really the means to an end but on its own it doesn't get you to the end. At St Andrews's Judith and I took on a lot in the absence of a vicar. Sometimes for me a family service isn't church. We run about so much doing the service whilst juggling children that we forget to be part of the service and at that point we have to question what we are there for. If we don't have time to stop and ask for salvation. Hopefully our efforts are worth it and it helps others but we need to also help ourselves.

I used to be guilty I am afraid about being very righteous about my driving abilities. However that was stopped recently when I received a very nasty surprise!

I used think that I was a great driver. I was invincible I had driven for 17 years only had one accident which was my fault which was an unfortunate incident in a company van many years ago. But more importantly after driving for 17 years I had never been stopped by the police or had any speeding convictions.

To my friends, family members and colleagues who had been I lauded it over them – *been speeding – not being very careful - etc.* if there was a sarcastic comment which could be used and exulted my righteousness I used it for all of that time.

And then I got the fateful letter – *you have been caught speeding pay £60 fine do not pass go do not collect £200* - in fact send us your license so that we may scrawl all over it. They don't even take the time to print a penalty!

I was certainly knocked down a peg or two and it stopped me in my tracks and it made me think again about how I presented myself I couldn't be that person or didn't want to be that person maybe I needed to be caught to be contrite. But it was an expensive lesson.



But actually whilst penalty points was my lesson it also reminded me the problems that being busy can cause.

The day I was caught was a Monday afternoon the day of David Widdows' licensing service. We had been camping for a long weekend in Bude and we were racing to get back after a weekend of surfing. We left the beach late (you can never leave the beach early) and had to get back early as Judith was singing in the evening, as a PCC member I HAD to take some food, I didn't have any food so I had to stop and buy some, I had to prepare the food, I was thinking about the service I was panicking about the boys going to sleep at 7.00 as we had spent the previous 3 nights camping and they had been to bed at 9.00, my niece was babysitting for the first time and amongst all this it was Nathan's birthday!.

There was so much to think about and so much to go wrong that my mind was full and I was concentrating on the wrong thing. I was concentrating on good things but the wrong thing all the same. Roads are 30mph for a reason, and that is to keep people from more harm, and at that moment that is what mattered more than all the other worries I had going on in my head. I was the Pharisee doing lots of things but not the important thing.

So as a result of that I managed to drive past the big white van with the camera painted on the sight at 41 mph!

But the worst thing about that conviction was where I was caught speeding. I travel all over the country and do a lot of miles in places I have never been before or will go again. I didn't get caught there. Instead after helping the parish council out by writing letters to the Somerset County Council to encourage them to introduce traffic calming features and to stop them raising the speed limit I got caught no more than 200 metres from my own front door in Waterrow.



Many of us are busy people with church life, volunteer work for good causes. It is easy to come to the service on a Sunday and feel good about yourself. But in the busyness of daily life Sunday is the time to take a break, worship Jesus, and to review where we are. What have we done that week? What are we planning to do the following week. Is it Gods plan? Have we been concentrating on what he wants us to? Not just in the bigger picture, but in those little moments. Or are we just getting caught up in righteous busyness?

And lastly, most importantly have we humbled ourselves to realise that no matter how much we do, pray, or regret, we still need to rely on God's amazing grace to have any hope of being justified before him.

Amen