

Biblical Background

LUKE 18:9-14

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING: This parable takes place in the area surrounding the temple in Jerusalem. It would be like visiting the Vatican in Rome today. This area was a busy marketplace, and the place where people would come to bring their sacrifices to the temple. Pharisees gathered there for religious purposes. The tax collector would have been there due to the close location of the marketplace.

TERMS: Tithings The first century Pharisees distinguished themselves by observing a first and second tithe, going beyond the required minimum practice.

Tax collector Typically an employee or agent that gathered money from the common person for the higher authorities. They usually were dishonest, gathering money not only for the authorities, but also collecting extra for themselves. They were despised and not to be trusted. Tax collectors worked for Rome, they were the hated overlords of Israel in the time of Jesus.

Striking on the breast This is a Middle Eastern custom signifying that one recognizes themselves as unworthy. This action communicated, "God give me what you owe me, fulfill your interpersonal obligation to me". The tax collector acknowledges that he is a sinner.

CULTURAL INSIGHTS: The Pharisees were one of a number of religious groups in the world of Jesus. They formed a "fellowship" whose members practiced distinctive observances of prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and tithing. In this parable, the Pharisee's prayer is entirely self-focused, and full of pride for his elite status. Jesus accuses the Pharisees of hypocrisy, being lovers of money and even of religious adultery. Obviously, their prayers and practices are not having the holy results that they claim.

INSIGHTS INTO MEANING: The Pharisee thought that with his practices, he was like God and therefore would gain God's favor. He scorned the tax collector whose practices were very much unlike God's, and that was publicly understood. What Jesus wants us to know here, is that no matter what we do, even when we do all the right things, we cannot become like God. Life in God requires something else. The tax collector "gets it", as he recognizes the one thing that matters before God, is the humility to recognize his need for God.

This is another story of God's "divine reversal". God's ways are not the way humans think and plan. God wants us to be open and receptive, and only this state, can we receive God's grace. When we are open, we can be cared for by God and others. This path of humility brings forth the healing and growth, and openness to the graces, that elevate us to wisdom. The wisdom is the way of God, not the way of men.

Family Activities

SHARING THE MISSION AT HOME
AND IN THE WORLD



QUESTION OF THE WEEK: How do the members of your family encounter "better than blues" in your daily lives? Commit to an action of humility and service and put it into practice. At the end of the week, report in to each other how it went.

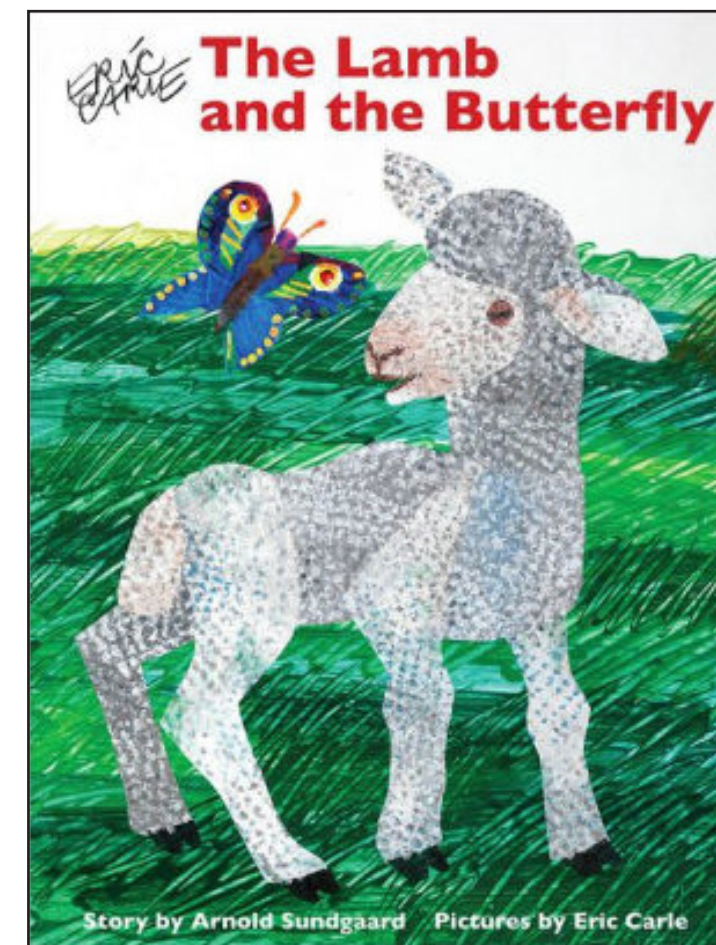
GOSPEL CHARACTER QUALITIES: HUMILITY
RELIANCE ON GOD

ADDITIONAL FAMILY ACTIVITIES: Create a collage. Find pictures of people behaving self-righteously like the butterfly and the Pharisee, and behaving humbly like the lamb and the tax collector. Talk about the change of heart that would be required of those people to extend themselves in humility and service. What would it look like for them to act on it? What new actions can you take to help cure this kind of "blues" in your family? Your church? Your school? Your neighborhood?

Cycle C 30th Sunday
Ordinary Time

Living Grace

"SECURITY AND FREEDOM BOTH
INVOLVE RISK"



*In **The Lamb and the Butterfly**, we find that an unexpected storm injures a butterfly. A baby lamb and her mother care for the butterfly, nursing her back to health. Once the butterfly is better, she must resume her journey, flying away from the meadow. As the lamb and the butterfly try to understand each other's perspective, we learn an important lesson about recognizing and respecting differences between ourselves and others.*

Art & Faith

CELEBRATING THE BEAUTY & TRADITION
OF SACRED ART



THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN

*Painting from Vie de Jesus Mafa created by Mafa Christian Communities
Cameroon, Africa ~ 1973*

EXPLORING THE ART: CULTURAL REPRESENTATION OF THE GOSPELS

Vie de Jesus Mafa (Life of Jesus Mafa) was an initiative undertaken in the 1970s to help teach the gospel in Northern Cameroon. French Catholic missionary, François Vidil, worked with Mafa Christian communities in Cameroon to create an enormous catalogue of paintings depicting the life of Jesus as an African man. The plan was to build a resource that would help Mafa people learn from the bible in a way that connects with their community.

The Life of Jesus Mafa took a long time to produce. Vidil formed a team of local church leaders, theologians, and a carefully selected artist. The team would spend time in Mafa communities, reading bible passages and getting people to reenact them. Vidil and his team would photograph their reenactments as the artist sketched them. These sketches and photographs became the basis of the final paintings in this collection. The collection includes more than 70 scenes, which covers pretty much every story from all four Gospels.

We are all familiar with the statues and stained-glass windows in medieval cathedrals in Europe where the environment and characters of bible stories are depicted as white Europeans in medieval society. Here, in the Jesus Mafa paintings, the characters and environment depicted belong to Africa, creating a visual depiction of scenes from everyday life that helps African catechists as they present the Gospels orally.

This painting shows the Pharisee, immaculately dressed in a white embroidered gown, his back turned to the other man with a sweeping right-handed gesture that denotes poise and status as he speaks, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people - thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector." In the painting "this tax collector" is shown in the background in nondescript clothes and clearly in distress, "...standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'"

Sunday Gospel

LUKE 18:9-14

Jesus addressed this parable
to those who were convinced of their own righteousness
and despised everyone else.

"Two people went up to the temple area to pray;
one was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector.

The Pharisee took up his position and spoke this prayer
to himself,

'O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity --
greedy, dishonest, adulterous -- or even like this tax collector.

I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income.'

But the tax collector stood off at a distance

and would not even raise his eyes to heaven

but beat his breast and prayed,

'O God, be merciful to me a sinner.'

I tell you, the latter went home justified, not the former;

for whoever exalts himself will be humbled,

and the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

Read-aloud video link:

THE LAMB AND THE BUTTERFLY

Written by Arnold Sundgaard & Illustrated by Eric Carle

Making the Connections

FOR ADULTS

IN OUR WORLD TODAY, WE HEAR A LOT ABOUT RISKS AND SECURITIES. GROWING OUR REAL SELVES IN GOD IS WHAT MAKES US BOTH TRULY SECURE AND TRULY FREE.

In this Gospel story Jesus is addressing not just a specific group, such as followers, disciples, or apostles, but a specific attribute - pride. Self-righteous and pride are problems that seems to be a serious flaw in the human condition. Flaws that continues to show up in human history and from which many wars originate. Jesus speaks to, "those that are convinced that they are more righteous", or better than others.

The tax collector and the Pharisee are two very different people trying to figure out their own identities before God. At the same time, they are comparing themselves to each other. In our children's story, the butterfly and the lamb are also caught in the trap of trying to figure out who is better than the other. Both the butterfly and the lamb are insecure in their youth and individual identities. The relationships in both of these stories, between the tax collector and the Pharisee, and the butterfly and lamb, examine freedom and security. The Pharisee is like the butterfly who says, "Look at me - I am so beautiful and free." They both foolishly think they can do whatever they want because of their state, position, and beauty. The butterfly thinks he is above the laws of nature and gets injured in the storm. The lamb and the tax collector get involved in things that lead them away from safety and security. In the end, however, both the lamb and the tax collector gain wisdom and knowledge of their limitations. Both grow an awareness of where they belong and to whom they belong to.

Jesus offers a way out of the trap of comparing ourselves to others. He gives a warning to both the Pharisee and the tax collector, "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted". The lesson here is that the one who knows their place and realizes their limitations, has the freedom to offer security for others. This attitude allows the lamb to be of service and support to the butterfly. Their friendship becomes the butterfly's shelter.

This is the remedy for healing the comparison trap - it is through appreciation of the gifts and abilities of the other that we can fly - that we can reach the heights of who God created us to be. No matter how we are made, with our strengths and weaknesses, God's way of humility and service, allows us to fly!

Making the Connections

FOR CHILDREN

YOUR STORY: What happens when you meet someone new? What if they are different than you? How do you feel? How do you react to them? How do they react to you?

THE CHILDREN'S STORY: How do the butterfly and lamb meet each other? How do they engage each other? How are they the same? How are they different? What are they both interested in? What attracts them to each other?

THE GOSPEL STORY: Reflect on the above questions in regards to the Pharisee and the tax collector. What changes the dynamic between them? Who is the wiser one? Who is the foolish one? What does the wise one offer the foolish one? What is the attitude problem that Jesus addresses?

Jesus points to the one who knows his need for God, and his need for others as the one who is following the way of God. What does that look like for the characters in our stories? What might that look like at your school, in the classroom or on the playground?