

October 23rd 2016, 23rd Sunday after Pentecost

I thank God that I am not like other people

A Reflection by Peggy Jensen

Based on Luke 18:9-14

Prayer: Gracious God, we are grateful that you accept us and love us just the way we are, not the person we think we should be. Help us to model that acceptance of others without judgement. God we seek your guidance as we build relationships within this community of faith. May the thoughts and words that we share be acceptable to You, our guide. Amen.

Two people went to worship.

One, tall, dark and handsome, dressed in a business suit. Immaculately groomed, walked proudly to the front pew. Looked around to see who was watching this entrance. Ahaa a quiet moment to reflect on the good service offered to the community this week, pro bono work in the court-room, attending the lunch at the Golf course for the United Way appeal, writing a cheque for \$1,000. Should make a good tax credit!!

Another one, dressed in faded blue jeans and a crumpled shirt, juggling baby and a wiggling toddler. Obviously embarrassed about their entrance, they sat near the back. Oh, for just a quiet moment to reflect on the wee. It was so busy with the kids being sick and the furnace not working. Now, here in church, with no energy left to even look up at the cross. Rather, the moment is used to offer a prayer for courage and strength to get through another day with God's help.

We constantly make assumptions about people but often those assumptions are utterly unfounded. Here are two people who have come to church to worship, one a successful business woman and the other a grandfather who was widowed last year.

Which person is worthy to come to church? Do we judge the people who come into this worship space? Do we make assumptions based on appearance without taking time to really get to know people better? You welcome people at the door and try to help them feel comfortable, especially if it is a new face, or one you may not have seen for a while. The important thing is that people have chosen to come here for worship, time to be with God in this faith community.

Truth be known, Gabriola is non-judgemental about appearances, I have to catch myself sometimes at the ferry. Gabriola has an eclectic mix of folk, it is quite heart-warming.

When I first came last November there was quite a division between the Anglicans and United folk. Many assumptions were made without really checking. This community has grown together over the past six months because you have taken time to get to know each other better. You have worshipped and worked together well. The hum and buzz at coffee time sounds warm and friendly. I am very glad you have stopped wearing those hats to church, too. You know you will always be Anglican or United in your blood but your heart belongs to God. I can feel the change You are happy to share the things you have in common as you worship and work together.

It was fun last week to share lunch and talk about our purpose for being here. The statement that we agreed on is a combined effort of interpretation and compromise. For instance changing worshipping and working to worshipping and serving. Serving God is not just work but a call to mission, serving is what we do as followers of Christ. Of course there were lots of opinions and ideas but the talking and sharing was actually fun. So Love and Joy are key words in this Mission Statement. It may not be perfect but it sets a clear purpose for who you are and what you want to be doing.

As you continue to build this community of faith it is important to remember we are all God's family. God accepts us as we are and we need to show that same respect for each other. Sometimes we are "Holy people on Sunday and someone else by Tuesday"! If you think back to the parable of the tax-collector and the Pharisee, there is a lot of judgement going on and implied criticism. It is the pompous Pharisee who says to God, 'I am so glad I am not like other people.' All too often we can get caught up in a conversation with someone, and start talking about another person, often in a critical, or judgemental tone. We need to be more respectful of each other.

At the Transition Team meeting we were talking about healthy communication. Rev. Jim Holland, who represents the diocese at these meetings, gave us some good advice. He said it was his rule when someone tries to share some hearsay or rumours or to speak about what someone else said he makes it clear. Jim says: "I will hear what you are saying, but not the references you are making to someone else. I will talk with them directly. I am not having that conversation right now." We all thought this was wise advice so I asked Jim for permission to quote him and he kinda smiled but it is important.

You know how some conversations can get carried away or be built on facts that may not be accurate. We all need to take care in our conversations, are they judgemental or critical unfairly. Sometimes we make assumptions based on what we have heard third person and that can get us into difficulty. Some folk bring up old wounds or past history that is not helpful. What you say may help to heal the wound, change can happen in a good way. Being respectful of each other is very important.

It is very difficult to read the closing lines of today's parable; "Those who exalt themselves will be humbled..." without thinking about Donald Trump. Need I say more?

Yes, as Christians who care about God's world, we need to pray. We need to pray for all the people who are experiencing anxiety about the future of their country. We can say how grateful we are to be Canadians, but we also treasure the democratic process of freedom of choice. So let us remember our neighbours in our prayers.

There was so much I wanted to say about the parable today. One lesson I want to share is about judgement. I do not believe God judges us, but I do realize how often I judge other people or make comparisons. Jesus set an example of being non-judgemental, let's remember that. So it doesn't matter if you come to church in blue jeans or a suit. What matters is on the inside. Come with an openness to engage in conversation with God, through worship and prayer. God invites us to be truthful about ourselves and to open our hearts to receive God's gifts of grace and salvation. God's loving grace is offered to all of us. Thanks be to God.