

**“My Bad”**  
**Luke 18:9-14**

After the service last Sunday, I headed out to a convent about 30-miles west of here where some of our women had gathered for a week-end retreat. I had the privilege of leading them in the closing worship service. We met in a beautiful chapel and when it was time to serve communion, I invited the women to come forward and form a semi-circle around the altar. There were about 30 or so, all of whom I knew. I began to serve and addressed each one by name, “Mary, the body of Christ for you;” Martha, the body of Christ for you,” etc. I didn’t miss a name – even some of the young women who attend South Ridge and whose names I have had trouble keeping straight, even with them I was flawless. Flawless, that is, until the second from the last to be served. She’s been a member here longer than I’ve been here. I know her name well, but I didn’t at that moment. I had to be prompted. Someone down the line behind me lamented out loud, “Oh, we were so proud of you.” I replied, “Yea, the problem is I was so proud of myself.” You know the proverb, **“Pride goes before the fall.”**<sup>i</sup>

“My bad!” *My bad* – I had never heard that phrase until a few weeks ago when our son didn’t call me when he said he would. When I reminded him, he said, “My bad!” Since then I’ve heard the phrase many times. A little research showed that the slang expression dates back to the early 1970’s and that it came into widespread use via the 1995 movie, *Clueless*. Talk about being clueless and not in the loop.

An entry on [UrbanDictionary.com](http://UrbanDictionary.com) says it is “a way of admitting a mistake, and apologizing for that mistake, without actually apologizing.” That is, “I did something bad, and I recognize that I did something bad, but there is nothing that can be done for it now, and there is technically no reason to apologize for that error, so let’s just ... get over it, and move on with our lives.”

*My bad* is a flippant apology that quickly adds, “Oh well!” “I forgot a name, I’ve done it before and probably will do it again – oh well!” I can be flippant in that regard, but I dare not be flippant about claiming to be better than I am. **“Jesus also told [a] parable to people who were sure of their own goodness and despised everybody else.”**<sup>ii</sup> **“Two men went into the temple to pray ... The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.’”** Had someone walked up to the Pharisee and said, “Aren’t you a bit arrogant praying that way?” I can imagine him replying, “My bad!” That would hardly be a sincere confession. After all he knew he exceeded all the law’s demands for righteousness. As the apostle Paul would later say about his life before meeting Jesus, **“As to righteousness under the law, [I was] blameless.”**<sup>iii</sup>

The Pharisees get a lot of bad press in the Bible. Surely it’s not bad to keep one’s self free from thievery and adultery. That’s being faithful to the Ten Commandments. Surely it’s not bad to resist being a tax collector, which in the time of Jesus was the moral equivalent to being a traitor. They were agents of Rome and often conned the people into paying more taxes than due, the

change being for the tax collector. Nor is there anything bad in the disciplines of fasting and tithing your income to God's work. The Pharisees were good people. The problem was, they knew it. The tax collector was not as sure of his own goodness, therefore his confession was far from flippant - **"God, be merciful to me, a sinner."**

Wednesday is Halloween. It is also the day when Protestants recall why they are Protestants. 490 years ago, on October 31, 1517, a parish priest posted a list of 95 theses, or "bones of contention" he had with the church of his day. That act of protest changed not only the course of church history, but also all of human history. The priest's name was Martin Luther. Let's reflect on the man. I'm guided by church historian, Kenneth Scott Latourette.<sup>iv</sup>

Born in Germany in 1483, Luther was the eldest of seven children. Although his parents were peasants, his father was a copper miner, hard-working and thrifty. They were prosperous enough to educate their son.

Luther was brought up in a religious home. He learned to fear God, to believe in the reality of heaven, hell, angels, saints, the Devil, and demons. He stood in terror of Christ as judge, but also believed in the efficacy of intercession by the Virgin Mary, the apostles, and the saints. He learned the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Creed. He was a "good Catholic" in every sense of the word.

He was a physically sturdy young man with a keen mind and diligence in study. Latourette describes his student days this way: "Luther was companionable and enjoyed singing and playing the lute, but seems not to have shared in the vices which were common in student circles. All of his education was in towns where ecclesiastical influences were strong, attendance at mass ... was customary, ... and the other ... expressions of Catholic life were part of the accepted environment."<sup>v</sup> That is, Luther was a good boy.

After earning his bachelor's and master's degrees, Luther set out to study law, much to his father's satisfaction. Soon thereafter, Luther literally had a "lightning-bolt" experience that turned his life around. A strike of lightning one day brought him within a hairbreadth of death. He responded, much to his father's dismay, by entering a monastery in 1506.

We can appreciate Luther's spiritual struggle by listening to Dr. Latourette again:

The monastery did not at once bring to Luther the assurance for which he longed. Indeed, for several years he was a disappointed, tortured soul ... In 1507 he was ordained priest and on May second of that year celebrated his first mass. That initial mass brought him terror, terror at the thought that he, a sinner, was presuming to address himself to the living, eternal, and true God. So nearly overcome was he that he could

scarcely finish the prescribed ritual. Now followed months of anguish. He sought by the means set by the Church and the monastic tradition to make himself acceptable to God and to earn the salvation of his soul. He mortified his body. He fasted, sometimes for days on end and without a morsel of food. He gave himself to prayers and vigils beyond those required by the rule of his order. He went to confession, often daily and for hours at a time. Yet assurance of God's favor and inward peace did not come and the periods of depression were acute.<sup>vi</sup>

The light came to Luther through the scriptures. While lecturing on the Psalms and the letters of Paul, he was seized by the phrase, "**the one who is righteous will live by faith.**"<sup>vii</sup> That changed Luther's life.

Let's look at Luther in light of today's parable. Luther was not *sure* of his own goodness. If anything, he was sure he had no goodness in him. He was a lot like the tax collector in the parable. Thought different in life-style, they were similar in their approach to God. Neither could look up to heaven. Both beat their breasts. Both prayed, "**God, be merciful to me a sinner.**"

Luther was also like the Pharisee. Remember, he was a really good boy. So was the Pharisee. I'd give anything for a church-full of people who pursued the spiritual disciplines the way they did and tithed all their income. Pharisee types are not bad people. Indeed, today they would be the backbone of the church. Luther and the Pharisee were totally different in their approach to God, however. Luther was no "little Jack Horner who sat in a corner, eating his Christmas pie; he stuck in his thumb and pulled out a plum and said, 'what a good boy am I.'"

In time, Luther came to realize he was, like all of us, both saint and sinner. We are saints in dependence upon God's grace which calls us and in our baptism gives us Christ's name, and we are sinners who seldom live up to our name.

Someone who has been inspired by the environmentalist slogan, Think globally, act locally, suggests,

- As sinners we may not be able to change the world, but as saints we may be able to change our communities.
- As sinners we may not be able to change our communities, but as saints we may be able to change our neighborhoods.
- As sinners we may not be able to change our neighborhoods; but as saints we may be able to change our homes.
- As sinners we may not be able to change our homes, but as saints we may be able to change ourselves.
- As sinners we may not be able to change ourselves, but as saints we may offer ourselves up to the grace of God and experience nothing less than a changed

world.<sup>viii</sup>

That is exactly what Luther did. He gave himself up to the grace of God and experienced a change within himself that impacted all of human history. Anthony DeMello<sup>ix</sup> could well be describing Luther's experience when he writes,

I was a neurotic for years. I was anxious and depressed and selfish. Everyone kept telling me to change. I resented them, and I agreed with them, and I wanted to change, but simply couldn't, no matter how hard I tried. What hurt the most was that, like the others, my best friend kept insisting that I change. So I felt powerless and trapped.

Then, one day, he said to me, "Don't change. I love you just as you are."  
The words were music to my ears: "Don't change. Don't change. Don't change ... I love you as you are." I relaxed. I came alive. And suddenly I changed!

Now I know that I couldn't really change until I found someone who would love me whether I changed or not. Is this how you love me, God?"

It certainly is how God loves us. Isn't it better to be sure of God's goodness than to be sure of our own? After all, when you trust God, you get God. But when you trust only yourself, you get ... only yourself!

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- i. Proverbs 16:18
  - ii. Luke 18:9 (*Good News Bible*)
  - iii. Philippians 3:6
  - iv. *A History of Christianity*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1953).
  - v. p. 704
  - vi. p. 705
  - vii. Romans 1:17, which is a quote of Habakkuk 2:4
  - viii. Leonard I. Sweet, Homiletics, October-December, 1995, p.20
  - ix. *The Song of the Bird*, (Garden City: Doubleday - Image Books, 1982) p. 67