



## **“Crooks and Evildoers, Watch Out!”**

Pastor Andy CastroLang  
monthday, 2019

### **Scripture (CEB):**

#### **Luke 18:9-14**

<sup>9</sup> Jesus told this parable to certain people who had convinced themselves that they were righteous and who looked on everyone else with disgust: <sup>10</sup> “Two people went up to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee stood and prayed about himself with these words, ‘God, I thank you that I’m not like everyone else—crooks, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week. I give a tenth of everything I receive.’ <sup>13</sup> But the tax collector stood at a distance. He wouldn’t even lift his eyes to look toward heaven. Rather, he struck his chest and said, ‘God, show mercy to me, a sinner.’ <sup>14</sup> I tell you, this person went down to his home justified rather than the Pharisee. All who lift themselves up will be brought low, and those who make themselves low will be lifted up.”

### **Sermon:**

Sometimes, the stories of Jesus seem unclear.

But not this one.

It seems pretty darn clear to me: pride is the real sin. Judgment of others, despising others, is the real sin.

If you are a “crook”, if you are an “evildoer” (a lawbreaker), if you cheat on your spouse...you are forgiven. Maybe you are stuck in these circumstances, but you are loved nonetheless.

We don't know what was going on in the life of that tax collector...but we know he asked for mercy for his own brokenness.

We don't know if he had the freedom to stop doing that terrible job, but he did pray about it.

So Jesus demands that we shut up our mouths when we feel the urge to judge. That we simply ask for mercy and love, rather than perfection.

That we pray, again and again, for love and for help, for mercy and for grace.

And Jesus also says that we should let go of the prayer of the fearful, "promise you will love me because I am doing everything right!". Let go of fear, and trust. Let go of anger and accept love. Let go of pride and receive mercy.

But not all pride is sin.

Westminster people can justifiably be proud of what we did on Friday night! What we created in our social hall.

Yes, we had a dinner, and yes, we asked businesses and individuals with money, to share some of that money with us.

And yes, they did.

But there was more to it than that, so much more!

We told ourselves we were having a "community engagement fundraising dinner". And we set out to tell some of the stories of Westminster's reality; serving and welcoming, fighting for human rights, protecting the vulnerable, loving everybody.

And there was music and singing, and there was delicious food and there were flowers on every table, and the wine flowed, and there was hospitality, and there were two kinds of chocolate desserts!

Yes, it was a feast, and it was a party!

The talk and the laughter, the personal storytelling from Jane Baker, and from Joan McConnell from the Tree of Sharing, was truly inspiring. People enjoyed each other, and the table hosts and all the Westminster folk were kind, and funny and awesome. Our guests were funny, and kind, and awesome, too!

When Deb Elzinga stepped up to the microphone to remind people what we are about, she was gracious and honest and she asked people to join us in choosing abundance over scarcity, light over darkness, and love over hate.

Who were these people, who opened their checkbooks and wallets for us? The Volunteers of America staff, and firefighters, food and commercial workers, union tradespeople, the Labor Council, the Imperial Court of Spokane, artists, politicians, Planned Parenthood workers, city workers, Spokane Alliance people, friends from around the city. Our Pacific Northwest Conference Moderator, Wendy Blight, flew all the way from Seattle to eat with us!

And for our part, Randy Crowe and his amazing crew of helpers created a magnificent meal in the kitchen. And the servers were wonderful. Gil and Rob were gracious smiling bartenders! Nick and Amanda welcomed everyone with registration and nametags.

And because John Larson was sick all week we got extra help from more volunteers, like Alan Borgens, in cleaning up for the big event!

I don't have to tell you how busy Andréa was in the office, last week!

So, no, not all pride is bad. I will tell you now, I am proud of the people of Westminster!

And let me finish with this, a friend who has been to many fundraisers and warned me against a muffled sound system that didn't work, and rubber chicken that didn't taste, and gatherings that dragged on and on and on...this friend, came up to me after we had ended the event, and said, "Andy, this wasn't a fundraiser, this was a community building evening!"

I am proud, so proud of this faith community-that shares the hard work of creating community-beyond all that separates us, finding our common humanity-and who, last Friday night, were brilliant!

Our stewardship theme this Autumn is from Ecclesiastes 4:12, "a threefold cord is not quickly broken." We live this.

This Sunday, we are asking you about your ability to share time and energy. We experience this gift to one another, and to our city and world, again and again.

May God bless you, every day, in every way.

Amen.