

# Always More

Presented By Pastor Scott Walters on 10/27/19  
At Crossroads United Methodist Church  
Waunakee, WI

I know what you're thinking. The preacher will do anything to get our attention and keep us focused during the sermon. Even so far as to plaster the front of the bulletin with Aaron Rodgers's picture.

But you, considering the extent to which Aaron is in the limelight; how much attention is given to everything he does and say; considering that, he is a pretty thoughtful athlete and, as my dad would say, "He's got his head screwed on right."

Once before a game, Aaron said this about the results of the contest: "I don't think God cares a whole lot about the outcome. He cares about the people involved, but I don't think he's a big football fan."

I'll come back to Aaron in a moment. After all, I've got his picture on the bulletin. Might as well make use of it.

Today, Jesus tells a parable that begins with the words, "Two men when up to the Temple to pray," and ends with these words: "And one went down to his home justified."

One of the two is pretty confident in himself. He prayed, "Dear God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax-collector."

And the tax-collector? He stands away from that Pharisee. His prayer is different. "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." This is the guy that went home justified that day. And the moral of the story: don't be arrogant or proud like the Pharisee, but be humble like the tax-collector. Sit down, Scott. Doesn't get any easier than that!

Except, you know that the Pharisee is actually right. He isn't like other people. He isn't a thief or a trouble-maker. He's not like the tax-collector who collects tax-money from his fellow Jews for the Roman occupiers. He would have been regarded as a traitor or a collaborator.

Even beyond that, the Pharisee would have been regarded as a faithful person -- even going beyond what is expected. The biblical term that you and I **don't use** is righteous.

To be righteous, according to the Bible, is to live your life in accord with the law of Israel. The better you are at keeping the law, the more righteous you are. As I said, we don't use the word "righteous" anymore, but we could fairly translate it as "successful."

If you are Aaron Rodgers you are one "righteous dude" according to the standards of NFL Quarterbacks. If you are good at your studies at school, you are a righteous student.

In the Pharisee's case, he is successful at keeping the Law of Israel. So this Pharisee is both right -- he is **not** like other people -- **and** righteous -- he has been very successful at living his faith. But he is **not**, Jesus says, justified.

The tax-collector, on the other hand, is pretty much the opposite. His is a failure at keeping the law. He has pretty much nothing to boast about. No one looks at him as a success and no one would call him righteous.

As a matter of fact, most of his neighbors -- who see him as sponging off earnings and assets -- despise him. And he knows this, and so he stands at the edge of the Temple. He would be one of those men or women who would tell me, "I'm not good enough to come to church."

But this is the one, Jesus says, who is justified.

Why? Because while righteousness is about what we accomplish; about our success. But to be justified is to be called righteous no matter what we have done, simply because God says so.

So this simple parable becomes kind of tricky. One might feel that they should offer the prayer,

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“God, we thank you that we are not like other people: hypocrites, overly pious, self-righteous, or even like that Pharisee.”

You might be righteous when it comes to humility, but you are **not** justified.

And that’s the thing, isn’t it? Righteousness is never enough. Because it’s based on our accomplishments and comparing those accomplishments with others. And we will eventually fall short. Nobody can escape this – not even the Pharisee.

Which brings me back to Aaron Rodgers. Say what you will, but he is an amazing quarterback. Year in and year out, Aaron puts up some amazing numbers. Unless he is caught gambling on NFL games, I’m thinking he’s a shoo-in for the Hall of Fame.

So, about three hours after winning Super Bowl 45 – and being named Most Valuable Player of that game – he said he felt strangely empty. Which is kind of stunning. He said he’d just accomplished everything he’d wanted to accomplish since he was a kid, and all he could think was, “Is this all there is to life?”

Maybe here is the secret to being a follower of Christ. Not to strive to be righteous or humble, not successful or a failure, not rich or poor; not any of the things you can put on a scale with other people – but instead to simply receive God’s acceptance, love, and mercy.

Recognize the fact that you are always in need. No matter how accomplished you are, we all have needs. And the minute that you see that, you can ask God to meet the needs. And you can give up the hope of better than others.

Because when one recognizes their need, one discovers God has already called you righteous and beloved. God has justified you. Thanks be to God!