

**St David's Sunday 27th October 2019
Last after Trinity**

**Ecclesiasticus 35 v 12-17
2 Tim 4 v 6-8 and 16-18
Luke 18 v 9-14**

**In the name of the Father, Son and
Holy Spirit. Amen**

**'To some who were confident of
their own righteousness and looked
down on everyone else. Jesus told
that parable'.**

**Now - are you sitting COMFORTABLY
- then - as they say - I'll begin.
You might reasonably reply - How
can anyone possibly sit comfortably
on a church pew. Well that's true.
Though in my student days, in
London, I once went to a church**

**where the seats were luxurious
sofas - rather like the ones at the
back of the Exeter Picture House -
more or less encouraging you to fall
asleep in the sermon!**

**However it's not physical comfort I
want to talk about this morning but
rather Spiritual Comfortableness or
Smugness even - as in the Pharisee
we read about in the Gospel.**

**He wasn't strictly speaking sitting
comfortably in the Temple - he was
standing - but Spiritually he was
'Comfortable' - as in smug and
feeling superior. Effortless
superiority perhaps, as in Mr Rees-
Mogg having a well earned doze in
the House of Commons - well not
really - more like Effortful
superiority - because that's how he**

understood a relationship with God. Obey all the laws down to the last tithe and God couldn't fail to be impressed. That's how you get right with God. Isn't it?

Contrast the Tax Collector. Tax Collectors were the first Centuary equivalent of today's Pimps or Drug Dealers - the dregs of Society. BUT - He knew he'd messed up - his prayer was a simple one ' God have mercy on me - a sinner. So the Bad Guy turns out to be the Good Guy and the Good Guy turns out to be not so impressive after all. Which are you - which am I?

If you have come here this morning knowing that all is not right in your life and are asking God for forgiveness - that's good - you're in

the right place. As St Augustine said. The Church is not a hotel for saints - it's a hospital for sinners. A place where you can be made whole - a place where you can get right with God.

Important as this lesson is - I'm more interested in the Pharisees this morning. Partly I think because the lesson touches a raw nerve in me.

What about the other Pharisee in our readings? I refer of course to St Paul in his 2nd letter to the young Timothy. What's the difference between his words 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race - and henceforth there is a crown laid up for me in Heaven' - and that attitude of smugness we

have identified in the Pharisee of Jesus' parable.

Well - the circumstances were very different for a start. Paul was, in chains, writing from a dungeon in Rome shortly before he was martyred for his faith. He had suffered for that faith, that belief that Jesus Christ was and is the Risen Son of God - he'd done - as they say - the hard yards. And I suggest to you that his words were a valediction of thankfulness that he had been chosen for the task of bringing the Gospel to the Gentiles. Those words and others in 2 Timothy are also a sort of handing over the batten to the next Generation. Timothy amongst others.

So Thankfulness - not Smugness

There's a place in worship and in our lives to reflect and thank God for his goodness.

But - and this is my challenge to you - and me - this morning. When does Thankfulness morph into Smugness. Are we perhaps sitting too comfortably this morning?

A couple of years ago we were at a gathering of old friends, who had kept in close touch since medical school days. There was a lot of reminiscing and thankfulness as we had reached more or less the end of our careers. But - I was challenged by a prayer that someone had given me. A challenge to being smug. You have it on the back of your service

sheet - I'll share it with you in a minute. I talked it through with my old buddies and it struck a chord. Were we too smug - could there be something else God was asking us to do. As a result of that thinking Helen and I retired from our NHS work and went back to Malawi (where we had worked before) as volunteers and did what we called a Senior Gap Year - which actually turned into Two. It was a fantastic time. A God given time.

God - the Holy Spirit - the Comforter - sometimes shakes us in our Comfortableness. And this can happen at any time of life. Not just to aging Medics - So look out! What might God be calling you to do? Don't ignore the Spirit's call - but carefully test it. Talk it over with

those whom you trust. It may not be a foreign adventure it may be something quite different, something less ambitious than foreign travel but nevertheless a big deal for you. Let's be open to Gods disturbing Spirit.

I hope in one sense you're all sitting Uncomfortably now - and not just because the sermon has gone on a bit -(although my timekeeper on the front row hasn't started waving yet) I hope your uncomfortable because you're thinking about that something in the back of your mind, that challenge

And now - That prayer

This prayer attributed to Sir Francis Drake, which I'd like you to turn to

**now - please -expresses some of
these thoughts in sailors and
adventurers language.**

Let us pray.