

July 6 & 8, 2018  
Luke 18:10-14  
Pastor Rosanna McFadden  
Creekside COB

## **“Read All Over”**

*[This sermon was presented at the Church of the Brethren Annual Conference Worship Service in Cincinnati, Ohio, on the evening of July 6, 2018. It was live streamed and the sermon was projected as the Sunday morning sermon at Creekside on Sunday, July 8, 2018.]*

**Good evening, sisters and brothers. I hope you can indulge me in a few words of thanks. First to Brother Enten Eller who is doing all of the live-streaming from Annual Conference. I am one of only two people who can call him Brother Enten in a strictly biological sense: we are children of the same parents, Vernard and Phyllis. Enten is 20 months older than I am; we have been competing for air time for more than 50 years, so it's especially gracious of him to facilitate this message tonight. I'd also like to thank friends from N. Indiana District and Creekside Church who have made the trip here, and those who have been holding me and this message in prayer.**

**Creekside is a small -- or not-so-small, depending on your perspective -- congregation: Sunday worship is typically 75-80 people. I want to tell you about a few folks who are part of my church. I won't be using their actual names, in part because they are modest and I want to provide them a bit of cover, but I hope that you will also recognize people like them in your own congregations. Darren started coming to Creekside about 4 ½ years ago. No one invited him, he just slipped in quietly one Sunday in January, and kind of melted away after the service. Like snow in January, he was back the next Sunday and fortunately for us, almost every Sunday after that. Darren was pleasant, but quiet. We learned that he was not really a new friend, but an old one: he had grown up at our previous iteration as Elkhart City Church, left as a young man and returned decades later after some challenging life experiences. Darren attended for a few months**

before we figured out his gift: Creekside was hosting a district-wide auction for Nigeria Crisis Relief and we had rented a huge tent which was set up outside on the lawn. We put out a call for folks to come on Friday evening and move chairs out to the tent for the auction. Darren was the first to show up and one of the last to leave. But we knew he was something special when he returned unmasked early on Saturday morning and started moving all the chairs back inside, because it pouring rain. It rained all day. We never did use that tent. Darren has served us in many ways since then, but never as a worship leader or in the choir or in planning worship.

Renee, on the other hand, plays a regular role in our worship services. Renee is someone who creates harmony -- not only because she has a beautiful alto voice and is a skilled pianist who knows a wide repertoire of traditional and contemporary music, but things just seem to go better when she is involved in them--not just because of her preparation and attention to detail and hard work, but because of her spirit. Not only has she has never been unkind to me, I have never heard her say an unkind word about *anyone*. Emails and conversations with Renee nearly always end with a word of blessing from her: enjoy this beautiful day; take care of the heart of you; or wishing you peace for your spirit.

I'm telling you about Darren and Renee because of a Greek prefix. You're probably familiar with it -- you certainly are if you've had joint replacement surgery or paid for braces for yours or someone else's teeth. The prefix is "ortho," and it means "right," in the sense of "correct." It's important to note that "ortho" is never self-referential: it implies correct alignment with an ideal standard beyond ourselves: this is true of orthopedics and orthodontia, where bones and teeth are aligned, as much as possible, to an external standard for optimum strength and function. This idea of an external standard also applies to other orth- words. In church settings we might talk about orthodoxy, which right-belief or right opinion. This too is alignment with a standard beyond ourselves: right belief is not the same as believing I'm right.

Brethren have historically been suspicious of orthodoxy. The Brethren movement was birthed at a time when Christianity was focused on establishing orthodoxy by forcing folks to subscribe to

creeds: making them say what they believed, so that the unorthodox could be weeded out and punished. Some members of the Christian family have “orthodox” built right into their names -- Greek Orthodox or Russian Orthodox churches -- but as far as I know, there is not a single Orthodox Church of the Brethren.

Brethren tend to be more comfortable with orthopraxis -- that is, right practice or right *behavior*. We love service organizations, disaster relief, work camps and other ways to put our faith into action. We have taglines which say we practice another way of *living*, and that we’re continuing the *work* of Jesus.

I’m not here to disparage either orthodoxy or orthopraxis, but I would like to invite a third member to be in harmony with this duet. It’s an ortho which I’ve heard less about, but which we cannot afford to neglect. It is orthopathy, right emotion, or right feeling. Again, right feeling is not the same as feeling that I’m right: orthopathy is right disposition in relation to God, which is bound to have some effect on our relationship to other people. I like to think of it as having our hearts in the right place. And here’s why I think we need to scoot over in the pew and make room for orthopathy, and invite orthopathy to sit at our delegate tables and in worship here at Annual Conference: it’s because of this parable which you heard read tonight. Feel free to turn to Luke 18 if you have your Bible with you.

It’s a parable which Jesus told about a Pharisee and a tax collector. Pharisees were not bad people -- on the contrary, they were the keepers of orthodoxy and orthopraxis for the Jews; a responsibility which the Pharisees took very seriously. The Pharisee in our parable is no exception; he is better at orthodoxy and orthopraxis than other people, and he’s willing to remind God of this, just in case God had lost track: the Pharisee thanks God that he’s not like other people -- especially that tax collector -- and goes on to list his orthopraxis of fasting and tithing. Impressive. Surely this parable is not suggesting that orthopraxis is wrong, or even unimportant. But where our Pharisee has shot wide of the mark is orthopathy: his heart is not in the right place. How do we know this? Because of the way he talks about his neighbor. The tax collector is a fellow Jew: he wouldn’t be allowed in the temple otherwise. Then as now, tax collectors were not universally beloved. He may have been a Jew, but a tax collector

worked for the Roman occupiers and he probably did quite well for himself, too, at the expense of hard-working Jews. That kind of collusion was despicable. And yet. And yet, it is the tax collector who is justified, and not the Pharisee. Why is that? Orthopathy. The tax collector understands the correct relationship to God: Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner; his heart is in the right place.

Worship begins when our hearts in the right place; and if our hearts are in the right place, worship never ends. Ethicist Stanley Hauerwas writes, “Christianity is to have one’s body shaped, one’s habits determined in such a way that the worship of God is unavoidable.”<sup>1</sup> Worship includes orthodoxy and orthopraxis, but it begins with orthopathy. Even if we believe the right things and say the right things and fast and tithe, if we sneer at our neighbors or belittle them in the temple or in the parking lot or on social media, we are not justified. We have not rightly embodied this parable or the words of Jesus Christ.

I grew up in a household which had more Bibles than people -- by at least a factor of 2. If my family had ever been called upon to swear on a stack of Bibles -- we would have affirmed, but we’d have been equipped. I sat and “read” the Bible before I could read, and my second-favorite Bible was the one which had the words of Jesus in red letters. I was fascinated by how the first two-thirds of the book was black text, then there was a smattering of red, and then suddenly there’d be pages and pages which were almost entirely red: Mathew chapters 5-7, John 14-17, and Luke 11-19, which includes this parable.

About the same time as those pre-reading days, there was a series of jokes going around. They all began with the same question: What’s black and white and red all over?” Answers included an embarrassed zebra, a penguin with a sunburn, and a man in a tuxedo who has forgotten his dress shoes -- you get the idea. There was a tricky answer which was a telephone book: because it was black and white and read all over. Get it? (If you don’t know what a telephone book is, ask someone over 30) I thought of that question as I contemplated this theme of Living Parables. If we are embodying the words of Jesus

---

<sup>1</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, “The Sanctified Body,” in *Embodied Holiness*, ed. Samuel M. Powell and Michael E. Lodahl (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 22.

**and allowing ourselves to be shaped and brought into correct alignment with the Bible, than our lives are the red-letter edition, and we are an open book for our neighbors to read. A living parable is someone who is black and white and read all over.**

**Before you decide to applaud or condemn my characterization of the Bible as black and white, let me say a bit more about what I mean by that. In the ancient tradition, scholars characterized the holy writings as black and white. The letters on the page were black, and the white within and around the letters was the space where the Spirit could move.<sup>2</sup> We must have both letter and Spirit if we are to be living parables. If you take a page of type and condense it so that there is no space between the letters, you will have a text which is illegible, unreadable. If you take a page of type and make it so expansive that it's just a white page with a few marks, it will be unintelligible, meaningless. My favorite Bible as a child was the Good News Bible which included the spare and graceful line art by Annie Vallatton. It takes skill to bring an image to life with line and space--I know, I've tried -- but It is only by thoughtful and artful practice that we achieve a balance of letter and Spirit so that the Word will truly live in us and be read all over.**

**I want to end by going back to Darren and Renee. You remember Darren and Renee, right? Two years ago November, a man came to the door of the church early on a Tuesday morning. He was clearly distressed -- he was so embarrassed and tongue-tied that he finally handed me a piece of paper on which he had written the details of his situation. He was supporting his wife and two teenage daughters, as well as his parents who were seasonal farm workers who had just moved in with him at the end of the season. He had recently lost his job, and that morning his wife told him to leave and not come back until he could support his family. He liked landscaping: was there anything, anything at all that he could do at the church to earn enough money to go back home? I wasn't sure -- I knew the lawn didn't have to be mowed in November--but I called our Property Team chair, and soon afterward Darren arrived. I knew it would be OK. Darren worked alongside this man for the rest of the day. I don't think they talked much; I'm pretty sure that orthodoxy never came up in the**

---

<sup>2</sup> Rob Bell, *Love Wins*, (Harper Collins, New York, 2011) x.

conversation, but in the manner of guys doing physical work outside together on a cold day, they were in fellowship by the time I took lunch out to them. They certainly got a lot done. Was that worship? I believe it gave witness to continuing the work of Jesus in a genuine and unselfconscious way. Darren was read all over whether he realized it or not.

I got a call from Renee last year, also in November. I wish I had saved the voice mail she left, but this is nearly word for word what she said, "Hi Rosanna! I found a song that I think we could use for Christmas Eve. I can play it and sing; it picks up the theme of Incarnation that we've been talking about, and I think it would be perfect. I'm leaving soon to come for Worship Team; I'm going to stop at Starbucks on the way. Can I get you anything?" There is so much that's right about that I hardly know where to start. I'm not saying that having your heart in the right place means you have to buy coffee for your pastor -- maybe *your* pastor doesn't like coffee -- but worship is more than finding the right music; worship is even more than being able to play and sing the right music; worship is letter and Spirit and grace. Worship is having our hearts in the right place so that the words of Jesus live in us and we are black and white and read all over.

Sisters and brothers, we have the opportunity -- the responsibility -- to be living parables as we worship this evening, as we discern and discuss and deliberate for the rest of this Conference, and as we leave this place and encounter the strangers and friends whom God places in our path. May God bless you and keep you as we bless the Lord and bless one another. Amen