October 27th, 2019.  Luke 18:9-14. Pastor Jenny Lee, Ph.D.

Upper St. Croix Parish UMC

**“The Words, Saving People versus the Words, Killing People**

I would start with a story: A mother was invited to a meeting for parents of kindergarten. A teacher talked to the mother. “Your son could not stay on a seat even for three minutes because your son is a distracted kid.” On the way the mother came back home with her son, she talked to her son, “my son, I am so proud of you. Your teacher told me today before you could not stay on a seat even one minute, but now, you could stay on your seat for three minutes. You are very improved. Your teacher is proud of you.”

On the evening of that day, her son had dinner well without any complaints about the food. Later on, her son became a first-grader. His son’s teacher called the mother and talked to her, “I recommend you to bring your son to see a doctor because your son’s grade is terrible.” After the mother heard his son’s teacher, she cried for her son, but she talked to his son, “I heard your teacher today, your teacher said, you are not a person with bad IQ. If you try to study a little more, you may be a winner for 20th at the next examination.” In fact, there are 21 kids in his class. As soon as the mother said to her son, her son seemed to be released from fear and stress.

After the son became a 12 grader, his teacher talked to his mother. “Do not expect that your son goes to a high school. He cannot make it because his grade is very bad.” However, the mother told his son, “My son, I am proud of you. Your teacher told me you can go to a high school if you focus on studying a little bit more.”

Finally, the son went to a high school, and he could go to a famous university as well. The son told his mother, “Mom, I knew I am not a smart kid. But your encouragement and love led me to make it. Thanks, mom!” It is a true story of the first analyst for the criminal psycho-mind in Korea; his name is Changwon Pyu.

The words have the power which is saving people, or which is killing people. In Proverbs 10:11, Solomon says, “the mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.”

We do not know about others’ hearts, minds, and souls. We may know about others through their deeds and words. However, through their words and deeds, we are not able to judge them as well.

Let us look at the Gospel of Luke! In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus told those who think of themselves as the righteous. There are two people; one thinks of himself as a righteous person, the other thinks of himself as a sinner. The person who thinks of himself as an honest person is a Pharisee, and the person who thinks of himself as a sinner is a tax collector. They went up to the temple to pray. They pray; the Pharisee was standing and praying, “God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.” However, the tax collector is standing for off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”

We know them through their words of prayers; they both seemed to like sincere and devout. As a matter of fact, one kept the law of God scrupulously or thought he did. And then, he thanks God comparing with others, which means he judged others before God. He has already trespassed into the area of God. The other was in a profession in which exemplary extortion behavior is not acceptable, while the one with the questionable vocation is. So, he thought of himself as a sinner in his employment as a tax collector, and then he asked God mercy and grace. On the other hand, the Pharisee had everything except the one essential thing, which the tax collector has been seen God as unmerited grace, burning love, and endless forgiveness.

The Pharisee was a teacher of the law of God, and then he thought he knows about God well. He thought of himself as a chosen people by God, and then he looked down others, whom they thought of not chosen by God. Jesus reminds us, however, the tax collector’s prayers are accepted by God, not the Pharisee’s.

What is the point in the parable? We may catch the end out from this parable. Jesus says, “I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Those who think of themselves as the righteous perhaps look down others or judge others. However, no one is righteous before God. No one can judge others, but only God may judge people. If you think of yourself that you often decide others by their words or acts, I encourage you that you try to judge by yourself through what you did.

All human beings are immature, and all have to grow up to Christlikeness. Until we grow up to Christlikeness, we may make mistakes to one another. Jesus taught us, “when the disciple Peter asked Jesus, “how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?” Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.” The seventy-seven times means four hundred ninety times literally, which means forgive them continually.

How could it be possible? We memorize the Lord’s prayer, Jesus taught us. In the Lord’s prayer, we may find the sentence, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Like this sentence, we pray for our forgiveness mostly every day, or every service: “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” In other words, if we do not forgive others who trespass against us, God may not forgive us for our trespass to God. Remember, no one is righteous before God. As we should be humble before God, we may be humble before the people of God. As we expect God to forgive us, we should forgive others.

The way we are going to be humble is always having gratitude to God and the people of God. Our gratitude leads us to be humble, as well as blessed in God. The first Thessalonians 5:18 says, “give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” God’s will is that we give thank God in all circumstances.

I would like to share with you what I learned from “the school for the Ministry” at Green Lake Conference. “What is the benefit of gratitude?” 1. Gratitude allows the celebration of the present. 2. Gratitude blocks toxic emotions such as envy, resentment, regret, and depression, so on. 3. Grateful people are more stress-resilient, 4. Gratitude strengthens social ties and self-worth. (Dr. Robert Emmons, UC Davis.) These give us a sense for heath life.

If you have appreciation in all circumstances, we are going to be humble before God. Our humble leads us to respect others. I encourage you to be careful about what you say to others. We may say curse or bless. Through our words, we may save others or kill others. Just remember the story of the mother, teacher and a kid. The Letter of James, 3:6. “The tongue also is a fire, a word of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life of fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.” We praise God through our mouth. And, we may pass over to others the blessings of God through our mouth. Let us be a channel of God’s blessings.

Thanks be to God, Amen!