

Proper 28 (33) - November 16, 2025

Luke 18:9–14

Consecration / Celebration Sunday

“Let us reflect the love of Jesus”

1. I turned 59 years old on Friday, but three weeks ago, I forgot how old I was until my body firmly and unceremoniously reminded me.
 - a. I ran the Fort Ben half marathon up in Indy, my seventeenth half marathon in thirteen years.
 - i. And while that averages out to just over one a year, I hadn't run a race in two years. In fact, I didn't run any miles for a year in recovering from some injuries.
 - ii. Because I had read that Fort Ben has some hills, I made the point to train on whatever hills we have nearby, and so I ran around Grandview Lake with Glyn Price and some other folks a few times.
 - iii. I felt ready for it. I had a plan. I think my body was ready. My right knee had been talking to me but we had a gentleman's agreement it would let me run it.
 - iv. The day of the race came, and it was a gorgeous Fall morning.
 - v. I lined up with all the runners, and that's when I saw her. The pacer who was carrying the 2 hour sign.
 - vi. In many races, volunteers run carrying a sign of their expected finish time, that way if you want to achieve that time, you keep up their pace and you make it.
 - vii. Unless of course running a 2 hour half marathon HAD NOT BEEN your plan.
 - viii. So, I forgot my plan (which wasn't a 2 hour half marathon) and I started the race running with her and about a dozen other folks.
 - ix. Once upon a time, I could run that pace. That's why I said I forgot how old I was, because I thought that somehow I had time-traveled to my 40s.
 - x. But my body and the hills decided to teach me a lesson in humility, and I ran out of steam.
 1. I kept up with them for about 4 miles, realized I was a fool, and I slowed down and soon lost sight of her and the group.
 2. But the early, unplanned effort had taken its toll, and I ran/walked the last 4 miles of the 13.1 mile race.

- xii. And so this time I decided to lean into that realization, and as I took walking breaks to gather up some strength, I started to cheer those who were passing me. I clapped, I cheered, I encouraged them.
 - xiii. Then I'd jog slowly and keep cheering those who were STILL passing me.
 - xiv. I eventually finished the race, and wouldn't you know it, my time was kinda close to the time I would have gotten if I had stuck to the plan to begin with. One way or another, my body knew what we had trained and prepared for.
- b. It occurs to me that my running story has some parallels to the story Jesus told in the gospel passage
- i. The Pharisee, a teacher of the law, thought he had it all figured out. He was like a runner running full of confidence and passing people left and right.
 - 1. He was praying at the temple and he knew he followed the law of God
 - 2. He was doing what he was supposed to be doing.
 - 3. But the thing is, he was being kind of a jerk about it when he was praying
 - 4. "I'm glad I'm not sinful like this guy and that guy!"
 - 5. "Aren't I great God? Aren't you super happy with me?"
 - ii. Meanwhile the tax collector was also praying at the temple, only he was like the runner who knows he's out of his depth, who knows things aren't going as they should
 - 1. He was also allowed to pray at the temple
 - 2. He knew he was not doing things right
 - 3. He knew in fact that being a tax collector meant working for the enemy: working for Rome to squeeze taxes from his own people
 - 4. And worse yet, being a tax collector put him in the huge, constant temptation of stealing from others
 - 5. So there he stood, aware of his failings and not comparing himself to anyone, but just saying honestly to God: I'm sorry. Forgive me.
- c. Time and again Jesus helps us understand how the realm of God is upside down

- i. Jesus wants people to reflect the priorities of God's realm
 - ii. Yes, Jesus wants people to pray to God, and also to embody those prayers
 - iii. Jesus wants people to seek guidance and approval from God, not for our own sakes, but for the sake of the community in which we live
 - iv. The realm of God isn't about holy over-achievers, but about people in the journey to reflect God's love in all we do, imperfectly, in fits and starts, but with a true desire to get it right when God redirects us.
 - v. Jesus takes the tax collector as an example of a complex person, in the midst of a corrupt system, trying to do the right thing
 - vi. And Jesus takes the Pharisee and uses his pride and overconfidence to remind us that God's grace and forgiveness isn't earned, but it's a free gift.
 - d. Maybe we see a little of ourselves in these dramatically different examples
 - i. We see our desire to get things right
 - ii. Our internal pride when we see we're on the right track
 - iii. Those sobering moments when we realize how far we have yet to go in our journey
 - iv. Most of all, I hope we see ourselves as someone who focuses on the example Jesus set for us, and we try to live as he lived.
- 2. Today we celebrate what God is doing through us in this ministry, and we look ahead to the work God will do through us next year.
 - a. The theme of our Stewardship campaign is "Let us reflect the love of Jesus"
 - b. The Gospel lesson show us someone who was focused on the wrong reflection on the mirror.
 - i. The Pharisee was comparing himself to other people and putting them down.
 - ii. Meanwhile the tax collector was comparing himself to the expectations God had of him, and knew he had work to do.
 - c. We are here as people who are in a journey of service, of love, of advocating for justice.
 - d. We aren't here to compare ourselves to each other, or compare ourselves to other people outside these walls.
 - i. As these mirrors around the church remind us, our work as believers is to reflect the love of Jesus, so who we see in the mirror is Jesus working in us and through us.
 - ii. And that also means seeing in others the reflection of Jesus.

- iii. Of course none of our reflections will be perfect. But we recognize that we're all on that journey, we're all running this race if you will.
 - 1. And in that race there are people who have trained and are setting an example for others,
 - 2. And people who are struggling to make it
 - 3. and people who are giving water and encouragement to all no matter how fast participants running,
 - 4. and there are people who are running with a friend or running alone,
 - 5. and people who can't wait until this race is over,
 - 6. and people who can't wait for the next race to sign up for it.
- e. That's us, in this ministry, in this church.
 - i. We are so grateful for those who generously give of themselves to serve people, they are truly an example for us all,
 - ii. those who are behind the scenes quietly but cheerfully making sure we feed the hungry, and give a bed or fire wood or a sweater to those who desperately need it,
 - iii. those who work in church committees that prepare worship, fellowship, nurturing support, caretaking of our building and our finances,
 - iv. those who worship here and online and pray and encourage neighbors,
 - v. those who have barely made it through the week,
 - vi. and those who can't wait for the next week to start,
 - vii. those who are hurting, those who are healing,
 - viii. those who are learning, those who help us remember.
 - ix. We're all in it together.
 - x. We're not here to compare ourselves to each other, but to pray we're reflecting the love of Jesus.
 - xi. And we cheer each other on, we pray for each other, we serve each other, we learn from each other, no matter our past, our degrees on the wall, our age, our doubts, our experiences, our concerns, our accomplishments, our setbacks.
 - xii. We're all invited by Jesus to live in community, and through our efforts to become closer to each other and closer to God
- 3. When you next look in a mirror, remember we are reflecting the love of Jesus in all we do.