

**Reflection**  
**All Who Humble Themselves Will Be Exalted**  
Terry Lindsay  
October 23, 2016  
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

**Luke 18:9-14**

9 *He also told this parable to some **who trusted in themselves that they were righteous [superior] and regarded others with contempt:***

10 *"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.*

11 *The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.*

12 *I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.'*

13 *But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'*

14 *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."*

In Jesus' time tax collectors were held in high contempt, because they were Jews extracting taxes from fellow Jews for the Roman Empire, and keeping a share for themselves, often more than their fair share—living the good life on the backs of their fellow Jews.

But who is it that we hold in contempt in our society today? Who is it that we say praying, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people?" Who do we hold in contempt, despise, hate, or fear? Is it Muslims, Blacks, or Mexican rapist?

Do Black lives matter? Certainly, all of us here would agree that they do. But is that enough? How do we help our black brothers and sisters feel as though their lives matter, when we live in such an insular society where most "Whites" have very little interaction with Blacks, Muslims, Latinos, and other minorities. For most of us Whites, our circles rarely connect on a daily basis with minorities.

I know bad stuff happens, I see it on the TV, I read about it in the papers and in magazines, but I personally am hard pressed to think of any bad experiences that I've had with Blacks, Muslims, or Latinos. But I don't have any trouble finding personal memories of bad stuff happening, particularly to Blacks, from the hands of "Whites."

As a child I grew up in the South. I remember going into department stores with my mother and being told, "Now don't drink from that water fountain that is for the coloreds." Or going with my aunt to a soda fountain in a drug store in Hastings, Florida in the 1960s, so she could buy me an ice cream cone, which would have cost about 25 cents, but when we entered the store the price on the menu was \$2.50! When we asked the lady behind the counter why so high, her response was, "Oh, those prices are for the coloreds."

Yes, the Civil Rights Movement stopped all that, but has it stopped the divide between us, has it removed the walls between races so we don't view one another as "Other"?

Why do unarmed 17-year-old black teenagers like, Trayvon Martin and Jordan Davis, get gunned down by gun-carrying white adults? Why are these adults so fearful and full of hate?

I recently made a trip to Iceland with my wife Barbara, and Michael and Susan Wisniewski. The flight there was nearly 6 hours long. When we boarded the plane Barbara took a window seat and I took the middle seat next to her. Soon a 6'7", 234 lb young black man, wearing a gray hoodie and sweats, with ear buds plugged into his ears and phone, sat and over flowed the aisle seat next to me. I greeted him and asked how he was, he replied, "Fine, but tired." Then he closed his eyes and proceeded to go to sleep.

About two hours into the flight, the young man began to stir, so I took the opportunity to ask him to let Barbara and I out for a bathroom break. Once reseated, and finding him more fully awake, I began to engage him in conversation. I learned that he had been up very early that morning saying good-bye to his mother and father and four siblings before boarding a plane in his hometown of St. Louis, Missouri bound for Dulles International to connect with our Iceland flight, where he would make another plane change in Iceland to Finland, his final destination. I learned the young man's name was Tiel Daniels, a former Colorado State University (CSU) power forward, who had recently graduated and had just signed with the Finland Vikings, a pro-European basketball team.

Tiel and I talked about his time playing, living, and studying at CSU. I found out he had a girlfriend in Denmark, which he had met at CSU and had visited her once in Denmark. We talked about what it would be like for him to live in Finland, what challenges he had ahead of him, and that this was a dream come true for him: to play professionally, and eventually make it back home into the ranks of the National Basketball Association (NBA). I became very excited for this bright, gifted young man, and told him that I expected to see big things coming from his career and would watch for his arrival in the NBA League. As we departed the plane we wished each other safe travels and off we went on our separate journeys.

I don't think the point of Jesus' parable was that he favored the tax collectors or sinners over the pious Pharisee. I think Jesus wants all to enter the Kingdom of God. I think his point was that when we think of ourselves as being superior to others we separate ourselves, cut ourselves off from the kingdom. When we act superior our worlds grow smaller, they become exclusive, insular. But when we humble ourselves our worlds grow larger, they become more inclusive, broader.

As a nation, if we must see ourselves as "Great Again," Number 1, the most dominate powerful country in the world, better than all other nations, then I think we make ourselves smaller, exclusive. But if we humble ourselves, and just do the very best that we can, not seeing ourselves as superior but equal to others, then our nation becomes great through its inclusiveness. And it seems the only way we can achieve such a world or nation is by transforming or changing ourselves, one individual at a time.

*"For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted."*