

**Commitment Sunday**  
**Luke 18:9-14, Pentecost 22, Year C**  
**28 October 2007**  
**By The Reverend Barkley Thompson**

We've just read the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. In it Jesus presents two people praying at the temple: one a confident and self-satisfied Pharisee and the other a humble and repentant tax collector. Jesus' parable provides the starkest of contrasts between the ways we can approach God. What is the difference between these two? Well, clearly, the Pharisee is self-righteous while the tax collector is humble. But there is another way to imagine the difference. Think back to the prayer of the Pharisee. His words, his posture, and his tone are forward and assertive. He rattles off his virtues and exalts himself in order to *justify himself* before God. Like some sniveling official in a medieval king's court, he approaches God not merely to elicit praise, but in order to **get something**. He wants God to approve of him in the way that the Pharisee so clearly approves of himself. In his prayer, the Pharisee seeks to **move God**.

When we think about the Pharisee's prayer this way, his contrast with the tax collector becomes even greater. The tax collector is not merely humble. He is not only repentant of his misdeeds and the flawed life he has lived. Whereas the Pharisee sought to move God, the tax collector seeks to be **moved by God**. He wishes to **be changed**, to be **made different** than he is.

In the end, that's what stewardship is all about. We come to God, offering our treasure, our time, and our whole selves not to justify our worth and certainly not to move God in our favor. **We do these things so that God may move us**, so that we—like the tax collector—may be changed into different people and be made whole...

*[At this point the Commitment Sunday stewardship skit began, with actors Gates DeHart, Margaret Grayson, and Liz Holt.]*