

Jeremiah 14:7-10, 19-22

Psalms 84:1-7

2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18

Luke 18:9-14

## Sermon October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2022

### *God's Grace Frees Us to Be Compassionate to Others!*

Seventeen years ago, I went on a cross-cultural trip with my seminarian colleagues to the country of Peru. During the orientation meetings leading up to the trip, I remember the professors who were leading this expedition, telling us how the water in Peru was contaminated, and that we could not consume any water from the tap. We would need to purchase bottled water. Even to use for brushing our teeth.

Well, I took this to heart, and loaded both my checked baggage, and my carry-on baggage with bottled water. For some reason, I didn't think that maybe, just maybe, I could have purchased this bottled water in Peru. I remember how heavy that carry-on bag felt (**Image**). I could barely carry it. The airport staff person had me place the bag on a scale to see if it met the weight capacity. Of course, I missed the mark by several pounds.

In response to my oversight, the airline staff person told me that if I wanted to take this bag on the plane, I would need to lighten its load. So, I started taking out all this bottled water. One by one, I passed a bottle on to each of my colleagues. When I finally reached the weight capacity needed to take my bag on the plane, I lifted the bag. Wow! It was much easier to carry. I felt like a big load was lifted off my shoulders.

Like, my carry-on bag, sometimes our emotional bag we carry within us can feel heavy. Can drag us down. Can be much heavier than the weight capacity needed for us to function well. The weight capacity needed for us to be all that God created us to be. The weight capacity needed for us to live out our discipleship.

Each bottle of water (**Image**) in our carry-on emotional bag represents all that guilt we feel from the things we say and do that hurt people. All those wounds we feel from the things people say or do that hurt us. And all that shame we feel for not being able to fit in, when our community labels us for those traits we have, and behaviours we show, that are different from what our community deems normal or okay.

Sometimes our emotional carry-on bag can feel heavy. Filled up with all these feelings of guilt, hurt, and shame.

Likewise, in our gospel this morning, the tax collector's emotional carry-on bag is heavy. The tax collector, who at times, may have taken too much from their people, feels the guilt that comes with hurting their people. The tax collector who is seen as

someone who participates in a cruel and corrupt system, politically a traitor, religiously unclean, feels the shame that comes with not being able to fit in due to these labels. The tax collector, who at times, feels hurt by the inhospitality of the people in their community.

The tax collector's emotional carry-on bag is overfilled with bottles of water that represent their feelings of guilt, hurt, and shame.

Well, in response to this guilt, this hurt, this shame, the tax collector falls to their knees, and asks God for forgiveness (**Image**). Leaning on God's promise of grace.

Now, for the people who hear this parable. To believe that God would welcome the tax collector, the political traitor, the religiously unclean, is nonsense. No way would God forgive this person who represents an empire who continually hurts God's people.

And yet, Jesus argues otherwise. Jesus proclaims God as one whose grace works in and through people in ways we can't understand. God's grace is a radical grace that touches the people we least expect. God's grace will surprise us time and time again.

No matter what we have said or done to hurt people. No matter how much shame we are carrying with us. Like my fellow seminarians, God is there, offering to take away those extra bottles that are making our emotional carry-on bag too heavy. God is there, forgiving us when we fall short. When we repent. God is there welcoming us, when our community falls short of God's invitation to be hospitable to others. God is there to lift us up from our shame, from our guilt, from our hurt, breathing new life into us.

Lightening our bag so we can be all that God created us to be (**Image**). Living out our discipleship in the world.

Because, what happens when we are forgiven for all those things we say and do that hurt people. When we are welcomed despite all our wounds and misgivings. We are freed from the chains of our shame to feel this compassion and hospitality towards others (**Image**). We are freed from our hurts, our anger, to forgive others. To welcome others back into our community. To help someone else lighten their emotional carry-on bag. Taking one of their bottles on. So, they too can be moved to compassion and hospitality. Living out their discipleship.

No matter what we have said or done. No matter how much shame we are carrying with us. Jesus reassures us that God is forgiving and gracious. God is welcoming. God is taking on all those bottles of water that make our emotional bag too heavy to carry.

Lifting us up to be all that God created us to be. Loving others as God loves us. Being forgiving and gracious as God is forgiving and gracious to us. Being welcoming as God welcomes us.

Let us pray, gracious God, when we feel dragged down by the heaviness of our emotional bag that we carry within us, forgive us. Through your hospitality, help us let go of our shame. And move us with your grace to be compassionate and forgiving to others. **Amen.**

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