

## Reflection for Proper 25-October 26, 2025 by Jennifer Irving

I've spent the last two nights up late watching baseball—anybody else? Isn't it exciting? Dave may have fallen off the Blue Jays bandwagon and has been busy with his daughter's wedding this weekend besides—(congratulations to Naomi & Kyle) but I, and thousands of others, certainly haven't! And here's something interesting about that—I heard on Global News Friday that:

“As Blue Jays pride continues to spread across the country, research shows being part of a sports community can actually improve a person's mental health. Watching a game alongside other fans can be a way to escape stress simply by spending time with other people and sharing a collective identity... experts say fans across Canada can feel good about more than just making the world series but also about uniting as a country.”

Then last night in the 5<sup>th</sup> Inning Stretch they came back from commercial and the entire Rogers Stadium was silent and the camera panned the crowd showing everyone standing holding cards with names of loved ones they were “standing up for” sharing in the Stand Up To Cancer Campaign to raise money and awareness. They announced: “Tonight we deliver a powerful message as we join our partner “Stand up to Cancer” and reaffirm a commitment to the fight against cancer. Major League Baseball, together with our fans, players and coaches, are united in our determination to defeat this disease for our families, our friends and our community. Please stand with us... in support of all those this disease has touched... Together, we can make a difference.”

I'm not going to lie, it brought a tear to my eye to see players and hear them say “To everyone standing in support of someone you love: Thank You” ...

Before announcing the Jonas Brothers singing “I Can't Lose” and the place erupted into music and cheering fans!

Neelah thought it was hilarious that I was starting my reflection today talking about the Blue Jays but I swear, I really do have a connection to Jesus' parable about the praying Pharisee and Tax Collector.

You see, it seems to me that the Pharisee praying “thank you God that I'm not like this person, that person, and especially like that tax collector over there” could only see what separated him from others—unlike us Blue Jays Fans.

Not only that, but it seems to me that Jesus is consistently encouraging his disciples, and all those who would follow him, that this type of thinking—that puts one above another and separates us from each other—whether it is a couple disciples on the road arguing about which one is greatest or those attending a feast debating who gets to sit in the seat of honour—is not what God is all about.

God is not worried about us doing things right or following the rules, or being the best at something (or anything), or doing anything and everything in order to earn God's favour and approval. God is worried about us helping one another, feeding the hungry, lifting up the lowly, loving one another and creating community—even if it breaks the so-called rules like healing on the Sabbath or eating with sinners. Jesus shows by example and by story that what is important is that we look at one another, not as the worst thing that the other has ever done but as a child of God worthy of our love and respect and inclusion.

And it strikes me that the Tax Collector turns to God in prayer and begs for mercy and forgiveness for all that he has done that has hurt this loving community he knows God loves and wants to flourish and thrive. And in so doing is the one Jesus says is “made right” with God.

Of course, the trick is, it's actually pretty hard for us humans to not compare ourselves to others and finding ways to put ourselves above one another. In fact, it happened even in the middle of our discussion about this in bible study! We were like, “Thank God, we aren't like that Pharisee, or like other churches who decide who's in and who's out, who are homophobic or racist.” Oops.

It's hard to break the habit of justifying ourselves before God.

In her weekly email, Linnea Good asks:

What is your way of staying at the top of the Ladder of the Justified? How do you answer yourself when yourself accuses you of being a sinner? Don't tell me you don't have a ladder going; we all do. Personally, I point to all my faithful busy-ness. 'See how much I'm doing? I never get to sleep before midnight. I must be a very good person.' It is so painful to be far down the ladder, that many of us will do anything to keep away that 'unjustified' feeling.

She suggests: This parable says: "Those who get real with God are beginning to get good with God." Than says: "That should be simple, right? Get real with God? Apparently it's the work of a whole lifetime." Indeed.

Perhaps we need to pray as Madeleine L'Engle does in these "Lines Scribbled on an Envelope While Riding the 104 Broadway Bus:"

### **A Prayer Poem asking for love and mercy**

There is too much pain  
I cannot understand  
I cannot pray...  
Here I am  
and the ugly man with beery breath beside me reminds  
me that it is not my prayers that waken your  
concern, my Lord;  
my prayers, my intercessions are not to ask for your love  
for all your lost and lonely ones,  
your sick and sinning souls,  
but mine, my love, my acceptance of your love.  
Your love for the woman sticking her umbrella and her  
expensive parcels into my ribs and snarling, "Why don't you watch  
where you're going?"  
Your love for the long-haired, gum-chewing boy who  
shoves the old lady aside to grab a seat,  
Your love for me, too, too tired to look with love,  
too tired to look at Love, at you, in every person on the bus.  
Expand my love, Lord, so I can help to bear the pain,  
help your love move my love into the tired prostitute with  
false eyelashes and bunioned feet,  
the corrupt policeman with his hand open for graft,  
the addict, the derelict, the woman in the mink coat and  
discontented mouth,  
the high school girl with heavy books and frightened eyes.  
Help me through these scandalous particulars  
to understand  
your love.  
Help me to pray.

+ Madeleine L'Engle

In all our praying, let us be brave enough to be real with our shortcomings, our fears, and our unworthiness knowing that God loves us, just as we are. For it is in praying this way, we can love, just as God loves. May it be so.