

**Lessons for Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost**

**October 23, 2016**

Psalm 5 (*antiphon: v. 11a*) ~ *A cry for the Lord's help over arrogant adversaries for all who take refuge in him.*

Genesis 4:1-15 ~ *Instead of examining his own offering, Cain removed Abel's gift by killing his brother.*

2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18 ~ *Paul was convinced that the course of life is measured and won by faith in Christ.*

Luke 18:9-17 ~ *A Pharisee used the tax-collector as a standard, but did not see the righteousness God gives.*

**GATHERING THE TEXTS:** Life Depends On How You Measure It.

Cain's offering to God fell short because he compared himself to Abel. In jealous anger he wiped out his competition by killing his own brother. St. Paul declared to Timothy that the race of this life is won on the merits of Jesus Christ, our Savior, from whom we have received the Crown of Life. When the Pharisee in Jesus' parable measured himself by the failures of the tax collector and other sinners, he looked pretty good to himself. Jesus says we get a more accurate picture when we measure ourselves by the Law of God, the way the tax collector did. Then we know we need God's mercy!

**PRAYER BEFORE THE SERVICE:** Lord Jesus, help me always to see myself according to your plan for me so that I may not think my worth and my powers or greater than they are. Rather than trusting in my own abilities, let me always rely on your grace and mercy. Amen.

**STEWARDSHIP THOUGHT:** Our offerings are not measured by their worth or size, but by our attitude in bringing them. The thankful heart of a cheerful giver makes the gift more valuable than all the jewels in the world.

**OFFERING PRAYER:** Lord, look upon these gifts the way You look upon our hearts.  
Consider them in Jesus' blood, redeemed from every stain,  
To be Your instruments of love in near and distant parts,  
Declaring that the shame of Jesus' cross is all our gain.

**CONVICTION AND COMFORT:** We like to compare ourselves to others to see how well we are doing, physically, financially, and morally. We exult when we find someone worse off than we are. When we find someone who makes us look bad, we find a way to overcome them, the way the wicked witch did with Snow White – or Cain with Abel! If we compare ourselves to God's perfect will, we can only admit our own powerlessness and look to the righteousness only God can give through Christ Jesus.