**Sermon Sparkler for the 20th Sunday after Pentecost**

So, I need to convince you to ditch the traditional Reformation Sunday readings? Okay.

The self-righteous religious leader thanks God for his self-justification, for not being like his “lessers.” Then, one cue, there is one of those “lessers,” a Tax Collector, one who sides with Rome against his own people, a greedy traitor. And his prayer is simply repentance for all that he has done. He asks God for mercy, relies on God for his justification.

So, at the end of the day, who is justified? The humble one who trusts God’s mercy.

Still not with me on using this as a Reformation text? Did not the 95 theses begin with a call for our whole life to be one of repentance? Does not the equation tithing=holiness ring hollower than Tetzel’s tin can? Is not the majority of the Reformation built on the question tackled here, the question of Justification?

* Can you hear the echoes of the Reformation in this lesson?
* In what ways do church folk reproduce the self-righteousness of the Pharisee? How can we avoid that?
* What sins may particularly trouble your folk right now? How do you preach to that need?