Persuasion of superiority seems to be the name of the game at the moment in politics. Persuasion is about others believing in you, maybe 100 of them, maybe an entire nation (Russia) maybe just one, if that is yourself.

The story that Jesus tells is a story about prayer, persuasion and superiority. The Pharisee saw himself superior to the tax collector, and everything points to that being the case. The tax collector was no simply office clerk, but was a quisling working for the Romans with a lethal army enforcing his decisions. If he came and knocked at your door it would be like a visit from a Russian recruitment officer in one of the occupied regions. You would not dare say no. There would be fear and anger.

The Pharisee had persuaded himself that he was a better man. Indeed the prayer was part of his own persuasion. Say it enough times and you will believe it. Worse the Pharisee had persuaded others that he was superior. He was, after all, someone who had not fallen for the offer of an easy buck from the Romans. He was someone who had kept himself pure.

Or was he?

It is a dangerous position to be in because it is relatively easy to fall from grace. The Pharisee had the 621 laws of the Israelite faith to uphold. And if he did then he was right with God, in his view. The Pharisee was persuaded that this was the only way to God and that he was superior to all humankind other than the next Pharisee. His prayer points this out to God, he tells God about himself and his apparent goodness. He makes it clear that he has done all required of him and what else could he do… There was nothing. He was a superior person to the tax collector.

Don't we as humans love people watching and comparing ourselves to them. Buy Hello magazine or any similar and there is something to be like. If only I could be famous, well dressed, wealthy, highly regarded, who knows I might be a candidate for prime minister.

The danger is that Christians do this and believe they are better than others. After all we are saved and they are not. Are you sure about that. Does that make you better? Or does it make you like the Pharsiee, so sure of your own salvation, your own righteousness that you lose sight of the reality of your comparison with Jesus himself. That is the only comparator for a Christian, not others for we do not act as God judging their salvation, relationship or for that matter goodness. What we should focus on is the lump in our own eye before we criticise the speck in the eyes of others.

Amen.