

"Christian *Talk* is Cheap, but the Christian *Walk* is Costly"

(a sermon based upon Matthew 23: 23-30, page 26 in the New Testament NRSV)

by

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Blind guides. Now, that's a dissonance, a disconnect, if ever I heard one. An oxymoronism, like "jumbo" shrimp. **Blind** guides. Blind people trying to **guide** others? No wonder we all end up falling into the ditch together!

Jesus called the Pharisees (the religious leaders) "blind guides" and "hypocrites." The second word derives from Greek theatre. **Hypo**-outside, **crites**-faces. "Hypocrites" were play-actors; people who wore **masks** to indicate to the audience the part they were playing. **Outside faces**, masks, *hypocrites*.

Jesus has three different complaints in today's reading regarding these play-actors who presumed to run the religion of his day. First, their tithing. Second, their cleaning habits. Third, their burial practices.

Actually, all three complaints fall within a whole **chapter** of additional concerns. Matthew 23 begins with Jesus telling his disciples to "pay heed to the Laws of Moses" and **give due respect** to those who sit in the seats of judgment. However, they are on **no** account to **copy** the Pharisees interpretations or applications of those laws, especially as regards how the scribes and Pharisees put those **interpretations** into **practice!** Jesus sees the Pharisee's extrapolations and interpretations **as "burdens" upon the people.**

Instead of trying to bring people together, and **lifting** the ordinary burdens of everyday life, the Pharisees were **adding to** the Law a number of stipulations that only **increased the difficulty** most people had of fulfilling it.

The Pharisees (who **interpreted** the Laws of Moses) and the scribes (who actually **wrote** the Laws of Moses either from **memory** or by simply **reiterating** an existing copy) were "meticulous" in keeping those parts of the Law which served to bring **them** into prominence. They wore longer robes than the rest, with broader bands and brighter tassels; they offered longer-winded prayers in public & brought more ostentatious gifts.

But there was something lacking in all their religious propriety, in all their show.

First, their understanding of *tithing*. Second, their sense of being *clean*. Third, their history of violence and death, which left the Holy Land rich with *graves* of the prophets and preachers (their sages and rages and ages of teachers!). In contrast to them, Jesus wants *his* followers *not* to be governed by the passion for *popularity* – the *love of place* and *power* and *prosperity* by which worldly “success” was measured.

The pursuit of popularity and power does *not* give rise to a shared sense of destiny, of brotherhood/sisterhood fellowship. It is only in the *selfless service* of *enhancing humanity* that the true pathway to greatness (and the real enlargement of one’s personhood) is achieved. Jesus wants us all to be “better” than our ancestors.

The first complaint regards tithing. The word simply means “10%.” Most of us in church know that “giving one’s tithe” means calculating 10% of one’s income, and giving it away. Give it to a cause in which you believe. Give it to someone who can use it for good. Give it away foolishly, and live on the 90% that remains in your bank.

Nothing wrong with a tithe! Patty and I do it, with my income here at Seaside Church. We give nearly \$6,000 a year to this church, just as our fair share. Our “tithe.” I would expect that many of you do the same thing, within reason, of course. 10 %.

But these hypocrites, scribes and Pharisees, *acted* as though they were doing a whole lot for the church (big decision-makers) when they *short-changed* their giving. And they made *a further show* of separating out one-tenth of all the herbs & spices they used to cook with – the mint leaves, and the dill spices, and the cummin seeds – just so people would *see* how diligent and faithful they were to every “jot & tittle” of the Law!