

Sunday, September 27, 2009

**Matthew 6.1-6, 16-18
Being Aware of your Motives
SWCOB 9.27.09**

A very poor old man,
Applied for membership in a very rich church.

The pastor attempted to discourage him from joining,
And put the old man off again and again.

Finally the old man sensing that he was not wanted,
Said that he would pray on it.

The following Sunday he returned.

“Well,” asked the pastor,
“Did the Lord give you a message?”

“Yes sir, he did,” The old man answered.

“God told me it wasn’t any use,
He said he’d been trying to get in the same church
For ten years and he still couldn’t get in.”

~~

A two thousand member church was filled to capacity,
One Sunday morning.

The preacher was ready to start the sermon,
When two men, dressed in long black coats,
Entered through the rear of the church.

One of the men walked to the center of the sanctuary,
While the other guarded the back.

The one man in the middle announced,
“Everyone willing to take a bullet for Christ,
Stay in your seat.”

Naturally, the pews emptied, followed by the choir loft.
The deacons ran out the door.

After a few moments there were about twenty people remaining.

The men put their weapons away and turned to the preacher,
And gently said,

“All right, pastor, the hypocrites are gone now,

You may begin the service.”

~~

That very Sunday, a mother was getting ready for church,
When she noticed her son wasn't up yet.

She finally went in to wake him up.

“Come on, get ready, you'll miss church!” she said.

“No, I don't want to go!” came the reply,
As he buried his head beneath his pillow.

“Yes, you have to get up for church,” the mother coaxed.

“No I don't. And I'll give you two reasons,” answered the son.

“One, Nobody likes me,
And two, I don't like them!”

The mother put her hands on her hips and replied,
“Well, you are going to church,
And I'll give you two reasons why you should.”

“One, you are forty five-years-old,
And two, you are the pastor!”

~~

You might find these jokes funny,
Or you might find that they sting a little.

The truth is that the Christian church has been the brunt of jokes.

And a lot of those jokes center on hypocrisy.

Let's face it,
The reason there are jokes
About the church being full of hypocrites,

Is, unfortunately, because the church is full of hypocrites!

But what better place to be on a Sunday morning,
For sinners and hypocrites alike!

Having hypocrisy in religion is nothing new.

Jesus dealt with it in his day as well.

~~

Our passages today center on three spiritual disciplines;
The discipline of charitable giving,
The discipline of prayer,

And the discipline of fasting.

Each time, Jesus mentioned one of the spiritual disciplines,
He warned his listeners not to do as the hypocrites do.

**So when you give to the needy,
Do not announce it with trumpets,
As the hypocrites do (verse 2).**

**And when you pray,
Do not be like the hypocrites (verse 5a).**

**And when you fast,
Do not look somber as the hypocrites do (verse 16).**

Whew! If Jesus was pastor in a church today,
And he preached like that,
I'm afraid he'd be looking for another church pretty quick!
The word hypocrisy is taken from a Greek word meaning,
An actor; someone who wears a mask,
Pretending to be someone he is not.

The word hypocrite is used 17 times in the New Testament,
And surprisingly, the word is used most often by Jesus,
To describe the behavior of the religious leaders.

Jesus condemned the religious leaders,
Who liked to talk the talk,
But not walk the walk.

~~

Jesus did not criticize the practice of charity, prayer, and fasting.
Instead Jesus criticized the motivation,
Underlying them.

Jesus warned his listeners to be careful,
Not to *strut their stuff*,
When it comes to 'acts of righteousness.'

~~

It is important to understand clearly,
The real nature of religious hypocrisy.

Religious hypocrisy is not failing to live up,
To the teachings of Jesus and his gospel.

We all strive to live according to Jesus.
But we are human and make many mistakes.

Religious hypocrisy is *pretending* to live according to the gospel.

Religious hypocrisy gives the appearance,
That one is a religious person when one is not.

~~

Keith Miller, in an article, in Christianity Today states,

“Our modern church is filled with many people,
Who look pure and sound pure,
And are inwardly sick of themselves,
Their weaknesses, their frustrations,
And the lack of reality around them.”

~~

Jesus saw through the Pharisees actions,
And took them to task,
Questioning their true motivations.

The Pharisees wanted to appear holy,
Even at the expense of true holiness.

They wanted to look religious
For the sake of recognition from others.

Jesus is saying that true ‘acts of righteousness’
Are intended for God’s eyes only.

Our charitable deeds,
Our public prayers,
Our fasting,

Should be done for God alone to see and recognize,
Not to enhance our public image.

In the end, we end up receiving our reward,
That of public admiration and nothing more.

~~

That is why Jesus told his disciples;

**When you give to the needy,
Do not let your left hand know
What your right hand is doing,**

**But when you pray,
Go into your room,
Close the door and pray to your Father,
Who is unseen.**

**But when you fast,
Put oil on your head,
Wash your face,**

**So that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting,
Only to your Father, who is unseen;**

**And your Father,
Who sees what is done in secret,
Will reward you.**

~~

By pretending to be something that we're not,
Or by making a big show of our religiousness,

We end up being hypocrites;
We end up putting a mask on who we really are.

We hide our true nature from God, and from others.

And by doing so,
We end up not being sincere or genuine,

Which, by the way,
Are words that have the opposite meaning of hypocrisy.

We end up masking the real issues we need to be working on.

And most importantly,
As long as we play-act our religion,

We will never be impacted by the healing powers,
Found in a sincere and genuine approach to God.

Jesus asks us to be aware of our motivations.

Most of us are not what we appear to be.

Often, deep down inside we are hurting and broken.
One of the ways to break down the walls of hypocrisy,
Is a willingness to confess our shortcomings,
To be willing to be vulnerable with one another.

A non-Christian who comes to church for the first time,
Can leave with the impression,

That these people have it all together,
They have no worries,
They have no problems,
They are not weighed down by sin.

Therefore they would never understand my problems.

OR

These people are completely out of touch with the real world,
They have no clue as to the true human condition,

OR are complete hypocrites,
Who are unwilling to confess and confront,
The sins and weaknesses found in all humanity.

~~

Let's face reality for a moment,
We all fall short of the goals of Christian living.

Yes, they are hypocrites in church.

There's no use pretending we have it all together,
Because we don't.

Ultimately, we may be able to convince others,
Maybe even convince ourselves,
But we will never convince God.

God sees through our falseness,
God sees through our hypocrisy,

God sees through our attempts at pretending all is well.

And consequently, God is unavailable,
To heal us and to save us.

God can't and God won't,
Until the time comes when we recognize
What truly motivates us.

~~

In Luke, chapter 18,
Jesus tells the parable of two men who prayed.

**Two men went up to the temple to pray,
One a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.**

The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself.

**'God, I thank you that I am not like other men—
Robbers, evildoers, adulterers—
Or even like this tax collector.**

I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

**But the tax collector stood at a distance,
He would not even look up to heaven,
But beat his breast and said,**

'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

~~

Brothers and sisters who received God's saving grace;
The Pharisee? Or the tax-collector?

~~

It is with humility that we find God.

It is with honesty and sincerity that we approach the throne of God.

A poem describes it well:

*When I say, "I am a Christian,"
I'm not shouting, "I'm saved!"*

I am whispering, "I get lost, that is why I chose this way."

*When I say, "I am a Christian,"
I don't speak of this with pride,*

*I'm confessing that I stumble,
And need someone to be my guide.*

*When I say, "I am a Christian,"
I'm not trying to be strong,*

*I'm professing I am weak,
And pray for strength to carry on.*

*When I say, "I'm a Christian,"
I'm not bragging of success.*

*I'm admitting I have failed,
And can never pay the debt.*

*When I say, "I am a Christian,"
I'm not claiming to be perfect.*

*My flaws are too visible,
But God believes I'm worth it.*

*When I say, "I am a Christian,"
I still feel the sting of pain,*

*I have my share of heartaches,
Which is why I seek his name.*

*When I say, "I am a Christian,"
I do not wish to judge,*

*I have no authority,
I only know I'm loved.*

~~

Genuine Christianity expresses itself in two ways.

One, it recognizes the sinful nature of humanity,
The reality that we are far from perfect.

And two, genuine Christianity recognizes,
The power of transformation in Jesus Christ.

That through this power of forgiving grace,
We are loved, we are redeemed, we are transformed,
And we are created new.

It is the power of God's love that brings wholeness!

And the first step towards this wonderful salvation,
Is to stop pretending everything is fine!

True healing comes when we no longer deny,
Everything is OK,

True healing comes when we, on bended knee,
Come before Jesus and confess,
"Jesus, have mercy on me, a sinner!"

True healing comes when we ask Jesus to come into our life,
And save us from our hollow and false living.

True healing comes when we ask Jesus to come into our heart!

~~

Today, I have an invitation.

During the singing of our last hymn,

I invite those who seek healing through the anointing service,
To come forward and let me anoint you.
I'll anoint you a sinner in need of God's grace,
Through Jesus Christ our Savior.

I'll anoint you for the forgiveness of sin,
For the renewing of your faith,
And for healing; body, mind, and spirit.

Join me in our Confession of Need,
Found in our bulletin.