

## Significant Teaching – Tuesday of Holy Week

Lenten Midweek #4 – 3/10/21 – Mt. Calvary Luth.  
Text: Matthew 23:1–12 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 9-10, [Jesus said,] “**And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ**”.

### **Introduction**

- ⊗ You and I have already, and still can learn a lot by listening to various teachers in our lives. In school, we are blessed by listening and learning from very knowledgeable teachers, instructors, and later professors in college. In the workplace, we learn a lot by listening to those who’ve worked in our field for many years and have accumulated a lot of knowledge and wisdom that can benefit us and our work.
  - ➔ We can also learn a lot simply by watching others. Through observation, some of what we learn can be good and beneficial, and some of it can be negative and harmful. In those later cases, we ought to learn not to act as we see those people acting.
- ⊗ For example, we can learn the importance of humility by watching how a humble person responds to praise and compliments when they come his/her way. They might deflect and redirect that praise toward others who helped them or we might see how they consider the needs of others to be more important than their own.
  - ➔ On the other hand, we can learn how not to conduct ourselves by paying attention to the actions of an arrogant, conceited person. We see how he is always self-promoting, or how she considers her own needs to be more important than the needs of others. If we see how they walk around with a sense of smug superiority, we learn a great deal about how we should not communicate the same by the way that we walk around.
- ⊗ In our Gospel Reading tonight, Jesus – always the Teacher – refers to both types of learning when He speaks to the crowds and to His disciples.
  - ➔ Jesus has *Significant Teaching* for all of His followers on this Tuesday of Holy Week – both what “not to do” and Who has done much for us.

### **I. Jesus teaches–don’t do what scribes/Pharisees DO.**

- ⊗ Jesus is just three days away from being arrested, tried, convicted, crucified, killed, and buried. And verse two tells us that He calls attention to the “scribes and the Pharisees [who] sit on Moses’ seat”.
  - ➔ Now, we must admit that we know almost nothing about this “Moses’ seat” to which Jesus refers. Some speculate that it was a specific piece of furniture in a synagogue, while others think that it was more of a figurative position or way of teaching that aligned with the teachings of Moses. Ultimately we don’t know for sure. Whatever the case, it does appear to be an honored and authoritative position of teaching within the religious community of Israel.
- ⊗ Jesus warns the crowds and His disciples in verse three, “So practice and observe whatever they tell you – but not what they do”.
  - ➔ So, when the scribes and Pharisees are actually reading and transmitting to the people the genuine words of Moses, Jesus is fine with the crowds and His disciples following them. But He makes it clear that the actions of the scribes and the Pharisees do not match the words that they often proclaim. They say one thing and do another – the very definition of a hypocrite.

- ⊗ In this interaction before us tonight Jesus teaches about some of those arrogant practices: He says in verse five, “They do all their deeds to be seen by others”. They were seeking out public recognition and notoriety. They wanted to be praised by others for the way that they piously practiced their religion. They saw themselves as the example for all people to follow.
  - ➔ Then Jesus continues, “They make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long” (v. 5b). A phylactery was a small leather box containing verses of Scripture that they tied around their foreheads or arms.
  - ➔ And the “fringes” or tassels were blue threaded strands that attached to the corners of their garments to remind them of the Ten Commandments. These have their origins in Old Testament commands, but you can still see them worn by members of certain Jewish strains today.
  - ➔ Notice again though that by making their “phylacteries broad” and their “fringes long” the point was to draw attention to themselves. In doing this the wearer was seeking to show himself as superior to others. It was all about being self-focused and self-centered.
- ⊗ Jesus continues in verse six, “They love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues”. Yes, the scribes and Pharisees loved to be seen and they loved the privileges that came with their positions. The best seats of course would be those that allowed them to be seen and heard by all. A lowly seat off to the side? Well, that was for the others; the less “deserving”.
- ⊗ Jesus is still not done. Verse seven, [they love] “greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others”. Obviously they adored their public recognition, because, at least in some circles, they were quite popular so that they would be singled out and greeted as they walked around the market and other public places.

## **II. Jesus teaches - we exemplify sinful pride.**

- ⊗ Well it’s pretty easy so far, for us to hear these words of judgment against “those guys”; those scribes and Pharisees and to think, “at least Jesus is not talking about me here”. But then Jesus turns to the crowds; to His very own disciples; His followers and He says in essence, “Do not observe; do not do what they do”. If Jesus considers it important to warn the crowds and His disciples about this pride-filled behavior, it should be obvious that the very same words of warning are intended for you and me as well.
  - ➔ And it makes sense, since it is through the same sinful nature by which we are conceived and born that we are all instinctively inclined to focus on ourselves and/or promote ourselves. Oh, how easily sinful pride can rear its ugly head within our midst:
    - Like when we work on a project here at the church and nobody says anything in the way of praise so we quickly decide that we’re never helping out again, or when others get their names in the bulletin for things they’ve accomplished, and we begrudge both that person and the ones in charge of the bulletin because we think we’re just as much or more deserving of recognition, or worst of all if we begin to think we are a bit more worthy of God’s blessings than others are because of all we’ve done or how much we know about the Bible or how often we’re leaving an imprint in the church pew or bringing our kids and ourselves to Sunday School.
- ⊗ Yes, let’s be honest folks. If the scribes and Pharisees were still around in the church today, we would all fit in with them mighty well, because that feeling of spiritual superiority comes quickly any time that we take our eyes off Jesus and focus them upon ourselves.

### III. Jesus teaches – when He is humble to death for us.

- ⊗ But Jesus' significant teaching is not only about what and whom we should not be listening to and emulating. Jesus goes on in verse 11 to teach His hearers that "the greatest among you shall be your servant".
  - ➔ This is especially ironic when we consider that Jesus is teaching this on Tuesday of the first Holy Week. Yes, the One who is speaking these words; who's teaching these truths is the One and only God-man, Jesus Christ. He's the only One who actually deserves all glory, honor, and worship from all people of all times.
  - ➔ And yet, as Paul writes in Philippians 2:6-8, Jesus is the one "who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant". Yes, ultimately Jesus, "humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross".
- ⊗ And that "death on a cross" is the only thing – the only thing – that covers all of your sin and mine; even our misguided, undeserved pride and arrogance. By His death, the slate has been wiped clean and no sin; no guilt remains.
  - ➔ As we were told in our Old Testament Reading, God has removed them "as far as the east is from the west" (Ps. 103:12); all because of the One who humbled Himself and took on the role of servant in our place.
- ⊗ To consider Jesus in all things; in heart, mind and spirit as "The greatest among" us is not so hard, since He is God after all. But to consider the second part of that sentence seems quite a stretch at first; that if He is the greatest among us, then how – why would we ever be able to think that He should ever be our "servant" (v.11).
  - ➔ Yet to know God's plan revealed in His Word opens up this truth so that, by the gift of faith, we now relish and celebrate the beloved fact that Jesus has indeed served us and all souls by His life, death, and resurrection!
  - ➔ It is in that deceptively powerful sacrifice – really the greatest display of power ever shown in the history of the world – that Jesus serves us the undeserved gifts of forgiveness, salvation, eternal life and so much more; things like peace and joy in the face of conflict and trouble, assurance in times of doubt, hope when all seems to be lost, unsurpassed love in a world and life saturated with hate and rejection, unchanging truth in a culture of lies and deception, and...well, that really only scratches the surface of the many ways that Jesus serves you and me each day.
- ⊗ Yes, we can learn a great deal both by listening to our Savior's teaching tonight, as well as watching His example. May God be at work in each of us daily to keep our eyes focused upon Jesus, not upon ourselves. And then by His power in Word and Sacrament and Spirit, may He teach us to serve God and our neighbor in all humility. For as Jesus said in verse 12, "Whoever humbles himself will be exalted"; not by himself of course, but by Jesus and His saving work alone. Amen.