



on Sermon 5 November 2017  
Joshua 3:7-17 Matthew 23:1-12 'What should I do?'

Prayer: God, may we worry more about the living out of your teaching than seeking status because of following you. So instead of telling people what to do, may we help them to determine for themselves what they think in their hearts to be correct. Teach us God, through scripture, reflection, community and prayer, to do what we should do. Amen. off



on 1\* St. Francis, remember is reported to have said: "Preach the Gospel at all times. Use words if necessary." These days an equivalent saying would be '**walk the talk**'. What should I do? *Walk the talk* is one translation of Jesus words from Matthew today because our calling to keep, is to preach the Gospel of Jesus; share the good news he gave through word and action; **and so be** 1\* participants in God's saving work, guiding all wanderers lost from / in faith home to God. off

I'm positive that every person in this room can think of a time / place / person / conversation / action they've done / seen / heard happening that was only ever going to work against God's saving work in Jesus, against Jesus' Gospel, against welcoming lost wanderers home to God. Not only can we do this beyond 'church' but sadly within 'church' as well.

My story towards this arrived this week when I had a conversation with a member of another Ak parish. In one of those conversational 'turns' she told me how her daughter refuses to go to church anymore because of the way the / her 'church' including its leadership has treated her mother. My contact is a mature and very wise Christian who knows to look to Jesus for her living standards – not her fellow Christians. 'Do as they say but do not do as they do' is what Jesus advised, for this person it's a truth she lives with. It's also a truth for us, because of our human frailty.

The lesson from Mt today **is personal** on – it does include us – there is no escape, no trying to avoid the scorching words from Jesus about what we should do, how we should live our faith both within and without; live feeding our own faith so it grows and matures, **and** live showing / acting that faith for and in the world – on display – in the spotlights all the time! off Do you remember the saying 'You might be the only Bible other people read?'



Today Jesus calls us to be participants in God's / in his (Jesus) work – saving work in the world. Just how that saving work is to be done is a very challenging call. 1\* We are to have "Christ like integrity. God seeks to save and provide for all people, and, when those who claim to follow Christ do so with integrity, God's salvation is *shared through them*. However, when we use faith as a way to dominate and exploit others, when we fail to live what we preach, **we** bring pain on others, and **we** get in the way of God's saving work in others, forcing **them** to listen to what **we** say, but reject the example of our lives.

Unfortunately, this hypocrisy is too often what causes people to reject the Church (my story) and its message in our world today. Yet, the world still longs for people of faith who follow Christ with integrity and who truly reflect God's saving character and purpose in their lives – this is what we should be doing.

Hypocrisy – 'a warning against hypocrisy' is what our scripture is called this morning. Hypocrisy is sometimes called 'being 2 faced'. on Exactly what Jesus is saying the religious leaders are being with their religious demands and pride of place. off It might help to remember that 2\* Jesus is a Jew, calling out other Jews. It's all 'in the family'. Truth revealed by family cuts deeper, faster and hurts more than 'outsiders'!



Jesus anger was provoked 2\* by the **burdens** that the Pharisees imposed on the people, "a myriad of rules, standards, and directives, and the whole process easily degenerated into moral bean counting"--so many, and so difficult to observe, even for these very same religious authorities." 3\* Scholar, John Pilch says of the Pharisees: "Sadly, Scripture is not the script by which they live."

1\* Sacridice; 2\* Thomas Long (Matthew, Westminster Bible Companion) from K Matthews; 3\* John Pilch (The Cultural World of Jesus Year A) from K Matthews; 4\* K Matthews; 5\* HWallace;

What I find interesting is that Pilch goes on to remind us that the Greek word we read as "hypocrites" is actually translated literally as "actors". What an image for hypocrisy: acting! No wonder Jesus was so angry. The Pharisees were not being 'real' they were 'acting'. Remember in his eyes **they were** the authority of and for faith, this is all tucked in his words when he said they (P's) 'sat in Moses seat'.

Jesus is clear – they, like Moses are the authority and therefore to be obeyed, 'Do what they teach..' But then he destroys them with his critic of their behaviours. It seems his #1 concern is because they have no compassion for the people. <sup>on</sup> They lay heavy burdens <sup>4\*</sup> because they 'miss the heart' of what they are teaching. They are all about 'them', self-centred / self-absorbed and nothing like 'Moses'. Nothing like Moses teaching or living when they should have been, what they should have been doing was following Moses model, just like Joshua did. <sup>off</sup>



What I think helps us see this more clearly is to hear the first few verses of Joshua. <sup>on</sup> This is the LORD speaking to Joshua, Moses has died and the new leader is installed – by the LORD but on the foundation of Moses. <sup>5\*</sup> Moses name is mentioned 6 times in first 7 verses as the Lord outlines his succession planning! "Continuity is neither simply for the purposes of consistency, nor for the success of the 'project' at hand. It is not an end in itself, but rather a symbol of the continuing presence of the Lord with his people." As such all the promises given to Moses are now given / – handed on to Joshua. <sup>off</sup>

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As we have been following in the past few months "The presence of the Lord with the people was essential for their liberation from the powers of Egypt which kept them captive. It was essential for their survival in the wilderness and now it is essential for their taking hold of the promise to them. Just as Moses was reminded, it was not a matter of whether he knew the Lord, **but that the Lord knew him** that was paramount in his work and ministry <sup>(Exod 33:12)</sup>, so with the people what ultimately matters is **not** their faithfulness to the Lord but the Lord's faithful presence with them.



This is shown for us today in the way that the people, now led by Joshua, cross into the Promised Land. <sup>on</sup> Like an echo of the escape from Egypt, the waters of threat and denial are held back / away from the people and their future by the LORD – symbolised by the Ark of the Covenant. <sup>6\*</sup> The Ark of the Covenant is central to memories of God's people from this time. In their hearts, in their faith the covenant box represented the absolute presence of God – with them. So today for them once again the saving power of the Lord's presence is seen. It is God's very self holding back the waters of the Jordan, for the safety of the people to enter into the promise from Abraham – to Moses. <sup>off</sup>

God's presence with them, symbolised by the Ark – is held up by the leaders, for the people to free them from what has been (the past), and enable them into a better future **and only** because God is with them. The leader's role, job is not to be 'god', not to draw attention to the 'self', not to burden and abuse the inherent power of leadership, ... and everything else the religious leaders were doing in Jesus eyes to his people. The leader's calling is to hold God before the people. One God – whose presence sustains all life, one teacher because we are all family, one father in heaven, one instructor the Messiah.

This is rather a 'flat' model of leadership and most of our Christian denominations have moved away from the simplicity of it and *sometimes* for good reason but... But there is no escape from Jesus words – as a denomination, a local church, an individual in faith, at all levels the warning applies: are we doing what we should do?

<sup>on</sup> Jesus makes it absolutely clear that to participate in his work to save the world we must live in and with a Christ-based, sourced, fed and nourished integrity. And at least once a year we must examine our inner soul and its outward behaviours so that there is no dis-connect between what Jesus says and what is done. Amen <sup>off</sup>



1\* Sacridice; 2\* Thomas Long (Matthew, Westminster Bible Companion) from K Matthews; 3\* "John Pilch (The Cultural World of Jesus Year A) from K Matthews; 4\* K Matthews; 5\* HWallace;

6\* Rev George Cowie, Minister of South Holburn Parish Church, Aberdeen, ;