

Sermon for Lenten Midweek 4

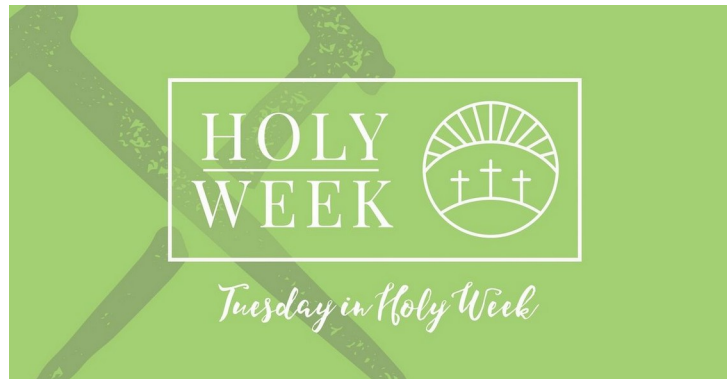
Date: March 10, 2021

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Zephaniah 2:1-3

Epistle Reading: Philippians 2:1-11

Gospel Reading: Matthew 23:1-12



Sermon Text: Matthew 23:1-12

Sermon Title: Significant Teaching: Tuesday of Holy Week

significant

Psalm: 55

Hymns:

LSB 543 – What Wondrous Love Is This

LSB 933 – My Soul Rejoices

LSB 861 – Christ Be My Leader

Liturgy:

Creative Worship



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Text: Matthew 23:1–12

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat, so practice and observe whatever they tell you—but not what they do. For they preach, but do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others. But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. 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. The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”

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Grace to you and peace, in Jesus' name. Amen.

You and I can learn a lot by listening to the teachers in your life. In school we can be blessed by listening to, and learning from, teachers. In the workplace we can learn by listening to those who've been in the field for years.

We can learn a lot by watching others. Some of what we learn by watching can be good. Some can be harmful. Sometimes the best lessons are learning what not to do. That's often a good reason to study history.

We can learn valuable lessons in humility by watching how a humble person responds to situations. We can observe how they consider the needs of others to be more important than themselves. On the other hand, we can learn how to not conduct ourselves when we see the actions of arrogant people. We see how they are always self-promoting and always seeing others, and their needs, as less important than their own.

In our Bible reading for today, Jesus, always the Teacher, refers to both kinds of learning when He speaks to the crowd. Jesus has significant teaching for His followers.

We're still on Tuesday of Holy Week today, and Jesus is just three days away from being arrested, tried, convicted, and crucified. Jesus calls attention to the:

“scribes and the Pharisees [who] sit on Moses' seat.¹”

Jesus tells the crowd:

“Do and observe whatever they tell you,
but not the works they do.²”

The scribes and Pharisees are reading the actual words of God to the people. Jesus is fine with the crowd following them, but He also makes it clear that the actions of the scribes and Pharisees do not match their words. They say one thing and do another. Which is why the words, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” comes from Jesus so often, seven times, in this same chapter following what we read.

Jesus teaches about some of those arrogant practices of the scribes and Pharisees:

“They do all their deeds to be seen by others.³”

1 Matthew 23:2

2 Matthew 23:3

3 Matthew 23:5

They were always looking for public recognition. They wanted the praise of others for their pious practices. They wanted to be recognized as an example by all who saw them.

“They make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long.⁴”



(A phylactery was a small leather box containing verses from the Bible. They were tied around a person’s forehead or arm. The tassels were blue strands that attached to the corners of their clothes to remind them of the Ten Commandments. These have their origins in Old Testament commands, and you can still see them being worn today in some strains of Judaism.)



Notice that by making their “phylacteries broad” and their “fringes long” the point was to draw attention to themselves. They wanted people to see them as superior, as better than everyone else. It was all self-focused and self-centered.

“They love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues.⁵”

The scribes and Pharisees loved to be seen, and loved the privileges that came with their positions. The best seats were the seats that allowed them to be seen and heard by all. A lowly seat off to the side was not for them. They love:

“greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others.⁶”

They loved their public recognition.

“Do not do what they do,⁷” Jesus teaches the crowd. The very fact that Jesus warns the crowd about such pride-filled behavior should serve to warn us all. It is the very nature of sin with which we are conceived and born,⁸ to focus on ourselves. How easily sinful pride can rear its ugly head.

Jesus goes on to teach His hearers that:

“the greatest among you shall be your servant.⁹”

- 4 Matthew 23:5
- 5 Matthew 23:6
- 6 Matthew 23:7
- 7 Matthew 23:3
- 8 Psalm 51:5
- 9 Matthew 23:11

How ironic, when we stop to think about the events we hear from Tuesday of Holy Week. The one who is speaking these words, the Teacher, is the God-man, Jesus Christ. He is the one who actually deserves the glory, honor, and worship. Yet as Paul writes in Philippians 2, 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.”

Ultimately,

“He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.¹⁰”

That “death on a cross” covers all of our sin. Even our own misguided, undeserved pride and arrogance. The slate has been wiped clean. No sin and no guilt remain. God has removed them “as far as the east is from the west.¹¹” The one who humbled Himself took care of it all, for us, and in our place.

It is that same Jesus who says:

“The greatest among you shall be your servant.¹²”

How true in Jesus’ case. He is the greatest ever to be among us. How He served all of us by His life, death and resurrection!

We can learn a great deal both by listening to our Savior’s teaching and by watching His example. May God be at work in us everyday to keep our eyes focused on Jesus, not on ourselves. To serve God and our neighbor in all humility, as Jesus said:

“Whoever humbles himself will be exalted.¹³”

Amen.

10 Philippians 2:6–7, 8

11 Psalm 103:12

12 Matthew 23:11

13 Matthew 23:12

Proclaim God's Word,
Encourage one another in faith,
Witness to God's love and
Serve all people

