

Sunday 1st November 2020 – Bulwell United Reformed Church

This week move on to Matthew 23: 1-12. Jesus accuses the scribes and Pharisees of not doing what they teach. He tells the crowd and his disciples that they have but one teacher, and one Father in heaven. Those who exalt themselves will be humbled; the humble will be exalted. *A short service for personal communion focusing on confessing Jesus is Lord is included. Please have your bread & wine/juice ready.*

A prayer of approach (based on Psalm 43)

O Lord my God,
send out your light and truth to lead me.
Let them bring me to your holy house
and to this time of worship.
I will come before your altar with joy;
I will come and sing your praises.
Nothing will stand in my way,
for my hope is in you, O my God.
I shall praise you, for you are
my help and my God.

Amen.

A prayer of confession

Forgive us, loving God:
when we trumpet our good deeds,
and show off to impress others;
when we sacrifice integrity for popularity;
when we seek attention more than we seek you.
Give us a quiet confidence that has no need to boast,
and that puts integrity before success,
so that we may be people of depth and honesty,
to your glory.

Amen.

Our Father

Song My Jesus, my Saviour (Shout to the Lord)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gn5CMSSAx_c

Matthew 23: 1-12 - A warning against hypocrisy

23 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: ²‘The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. ³So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practise what they preach. ⁴They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.



⁵‘Everything they do is done for people to see: they make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; ⁶they love the place of honour at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; ⁷they love to be greeted with respect in the market-places and to be called “Rabbi” by others.

⁸‘But you are not to be called “Rabbi”, for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. ⁹And do not call anyone on earth “father”, for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. ¹⁰Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah. ¹¹The greatest among you will be your servant. ¹²For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. (NIVUK)

What lies beneath – Matthew 23: 1-12

It is important that we do not present the Pharisees as, always and everywhere, the chief villains in the New Testament. Jesus’ accusation is that Pharisees impose rules intended to help people to live in a right relationship, but they often fail to help people cope (v.4). Worse still, they offer a faith that is too concerned with what others think (vv.5-7). The Pharisees are also accused here of seeking worldly honour. They put on a show with their dress, they expect honorific titles, places of honour, and they are 'unwilling to lift a finger' for those who are burdened by their teaching. In contrast, Jesus says to his followers (v.8): ‘But you...’ – suggesting that they must be different.

The key verses in for us in this passage are verse 3 where we are told not to follow the practice of the Pharisees, and verse 12 with **its summons to practice humility**. Humility is often referred to by Jesus is what might be called a 'keynote theme' of Jesus that he repeated on many occasions.

In verses 8-10 Jesus gives us a lesson in hierarchy. All of humanity is equal and there is no human rabbi, teacher, father or instructor that is fundamentally more important than another human. Only Jesus is the true rabbi or teacher who has dominion over human beings. Verses 11-12 turn logic upside down. Jesus' radical assertion that the greatest will be a servant refers ultimately to himself. Humility and exaltation will be reversed as well. Attempting to be better than your fellow human beings will be judged harshly while loving and serving others is godly behaviour.

This is the force and power of our mission – to be people of integrity where our words and actions match up. There is to be consistency to our faith and behaviour. James puts it like this in chapter 2: 14-17,

*¹⁴What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? ¹⁵Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷In the same way, **faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.***

When Jesus says in verse 8, ‘But you,’ he is asking us to be humble, to be prepared to examine ourselves and not fall into the same traps as the Pharisees which he outlines in the passage. Then we shall be congregations of love, faith, action and integrity that will make

an impact in our communities. During lockdown situations since March, I think that congregations have shown faith in action in many innovative ways through practical support and caring. We have made a difference and shown faith in action.

And most importantly, and most illuminatingly, Jesus speaks as one who does far more than just lift a finger to help us. Jesus speaks as one who knows that he is on the way to the cross. He speaks as one who is himself carrying the greatest burden of all, the full weight of the violent sin and hostility of the world, bearing down on his shoulders in the form of a wooden cross and savage nails. And Jesus bears this burden willingly, surely not happily, but willingly, in order that all those who are tired and heavy laden might come to him and find rest and find themselves set free to be transformed in his image into a new people whose God-given righteousness might not fit in the old burdensome load of harsh regulations, but will lead us all through the cleansing waters and into the promised land of life and love and mercy to the glory of God.

Prayers of intercession

We pray for those who are considered to be great in our world
– all who have power and influence over others – that they may have serving hearts:
hearts that speak up for the poor, and not flatter the rich;
hearts that embrace unity, and not enforce division;
hearts that would free justice, and not imprison truth;
hearts that would respect all creation, and not destroy her riches;
that your kingdom may come, and your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen.

Today, we pray for all who feel isolated.
In their uniqueness, they may also feel alone.
This is most of us, some of the time,
but it is some of us most of the time.
God of encounter, may we all turn with love and interest
towards those who have been isolated.
God of encounter:
hear our prayer. Amen.

Song To be in your presence (Kate Miner)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sfk2Z2aOqWU>

HOLY COMMUNION Thanksgiving - What lies beneath - Matthew 23: 1-12

We give you all thanks and praise, O God,
O God of lasting love and Lord of goodness,
for you have lifted the burden of oppression from us
and called us into your own kingdom and glory.

In your child, Jesus the Messiah,
your Word has come to us as good news,
working within us that we might live lives worthy of you.
When he was killed by those
who mouth the truth but live a lie,
you raised him to life
and sent your Spirit as our true teacher,
leading us in the way of humility
to the exaltation of your Kingdom.



Therefore, with our hearts lifted high,
we offer you thanks and praise at all times
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

The Sharing of the Bread and the Wine

We give thanks to you, O God, that you cause the vine to yield fruit.
We bless you for Christ, the true vine, whose blood was poured out for us.
By your Holy Spirit sanctify us and this wine, that the cup which we bless may be to us the communion of the blood of Christ, and that through abiding in him we may bear fruit that shall last.

Eat this bread. It is the bread of life.

Drink this wine. It is the cup of blessing.

Prayer after communion

Loving God, you have fed us generously at this table, as we have remembered Jesus and rejoiced that he is with us today. We are ready now to follow him, and to be your people in the world. May your Holy Spirit show us the way, make us holy and fill us with love.

A sending out prayer

Look to the good of others,
be great at giving encouragement,
and bless as you are blessed.
In Jesus' name.

Amen.

