

Holy Textures

Meeting Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
Short, easy to use, faith-provoking insights.

Matthew 23:1-12

Unfortunately, the scribes and Pharisees - like us - were the ones who studied the Bible, who prayed regularly, and who earnestly sought to live in accordance with Biblical teachings. That is, they are who we are now. Are we like them? Yikes!

Year A

Pentecost 20

October 30, 2011

Sunday Between October 30 and November 5 Inclusive

Proper 26, Ordinary Time 31

All Saints is November 1, or may be celebrated as the first Sunday in November. See [Matthew 5:1-12](#) for All Saints commentary.

Read the passage at the bottom of this post: [Matthew 23:1-12, The Message](#) or [Matthew 23:1-12, The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#).

Click here, [Matthew 23:1-12](#), for an easy to print or email Adobe PDF version of this note.

Sermon by the [Rev. Dr. George Hermanson](#), "[A Question of Humility](#)."

Just in case you thought Jesus got himself killed for being meek and mild mannered, in this chapter we have a text full of Jesus swearing, cursing and insulting.

Since we are followers of Jesus, we probably imagine ourselves safely hiding behind his coat tails while he dresses down the scribes and Pharisees for their pride, hypocrisy and onerous demands.

Unfortunately, they were the religious leaders of their day. They - like us - were the ones who studied the Bible, who prayed regularly, and who earnestly sought to live in accordance with Biblical teachings. That is, they are who we are now.

Frankly, I'm not sure where the Good News is in this passage. If we sort out the attacks on the Scribes and Pharisees as being "chaff," then I suppose there is some "wheat," in the teaching about how we are to live:

- Listen to those who are knowledgeable about the Bible and practice what they teach.
- Make sure that we ourselves practice what we preach.
- Don't lay heavy, strict, narrow moral burdens on others.
- Don't make a show of our faith.
- Be humble; don't look for fancy titles or other rewards.
- Treat one another as equals.

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This might be a good opportunity to recognize that passages like this have a shameful history of being the fuel for violence against Jews. Check out my note, [it's "Judeans," Not "Jews,"](#) for more background on this.

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Historical background information in this post is drawn primarily from Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels, see link below, pages 115-117.

* [Link to Amazon.com Bibliography for Bruce Malina, et. al.](#), Social Science Commentary on ... The Synoptic Gospels; The Gospel of John; The Book of Acts; The Letters of Paul; The Book of Revelation; and others.

Matthew 23:1-12 (NRSV)

¹ Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ² "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; ³ therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. ⁴ They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. ⁵ They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. ⁶ They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, ⁷ and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have people call them rabbi. ⁸ But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. ⁹ And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father—the one in heaven. ¹⁰ Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah. ¹¹ The greatest among you will be your servant. ¹² All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.

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Matthew 23:1-12 (The Message)

¹ Now Jesus turned to address his disciples, along with the crowd that had gathered with them. ² "The religion scholars and Pharisees are competent teachers in God's Law. ³ You won't go wrong in following their teachings on Moses. But be careful about following them. They talk a good line, but they don't live it. They don't take it into their hearts and live it out in their behavior. It's all spit-and-polish veneer.

⁴ "Instead of giving you God's Law as food and drink by which you can banquet on God, they package it in bundles of rules, loading you down like pack animals. They seem to take pleasure in watching you stagger under these loads, and wouldn't think of lifting a finger to help. ⁵ Their lives are perpetual fashion shows, embroidered prayer shawls one day and flowery prayers the next. ⁶ They love to sit at the head table at church dinners, basking in the most prominent positions, ⁷ preening in the radiance of public flattery, receiving honorary degrees, and getting called 'Doctor' and 'Reverend.'

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⁸ "Don't let people do that to you, put you on a pedestal like that. You all have a single Teacher, and you are all classmates. ⁹ Don't set people up as experts over your life, letting them tell you what to do. Save that authority for God; let him tell you what to do. No one else should carry the title of 'Father'; you have only one Father, and he's in heaven. ¹⁰ And don't let people maneuver you into taking charge of them. There is only one Life-Leader for you and them—Christ.

¹¹ "Do you want to stand out? Then step down. Be a servant. ¹² If you puff yourself up, you'll get the wind knocked out of you. But if you're content to simply be yourself, your life will count for plenty.

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