



62A PENTECOST 22A BIBLE STUDY

Looking Good – Being Good

Abstract

“The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.

Matthew 23:2-3

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62A Pentecost 22A Bible Study

Looking Good – Being Good

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2020 | AFTER PENTECOST | PROPER 26 YEAR A

On the same date: All Saints

Old Testament & Psalm, Option I

Old Testament Joshua 3:7–17

Psalm Psalm 107:1–7, 33–37

or

Old Testament & Psalm, Option II

Old Testament Micah 3:5–12

Psalm Psalm 43

New Testament 1 Thessalonians 2:9–13

Gospel Matthew 23:1–12

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.

This week's resources explore: looking good; speaking the truth; honest living.

Welcome and opening prayer

A prayer of approach

Gracious God,

as, together, we come to you today,
we acknowledge our mixed emotions
and our differing gifts and needs.

May a desire to serve unite us.

May the truth of the gospel encourage us.

And may the example of your Son inspire us.

We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Readings

Matthew 23:1–12

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 practice 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 honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; ⁷they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces 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. ¹

respond

For the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Exegesis

Gospel: 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). In contrast, Jesus says to his followers (v.8): ‘But you...’ – suggesting that they must be different.

More generally, however, the Pharisees had a passion for Israel to keep the Law in its entirety. This was what was required to be the true people of the Covenant (see the comments on this week’s Old Testament reading). But, the Covenant also offers forgiveness and restoration – for example, through the ‘Day of Atonement’ ritual. That Jesus criticises some of the Pharisees’ practices is not the same as saying that they are all bad! Nevertheless, in this passage, five faults typical of religious people are identified:

- They don’t practise what they preach.
- They are unwilling to do what they demand of others.
- They love to show off.
- They revel in titles, and recognition by others.
- They misunderstand what they are called to be.

Jesus recognises and affirms the Pharisees as the inheritors of Moses’ role as teacher of the Law (vv.2-3a). He upholds the Covenant, and the Law as the practice of the Covenant. The problem is that the practice of living the Law is just as important as understanding it. And here Jesus identifies discrepancies between understanding and action (vv.3b-4). In part, this is a consequence of a mistaken sense of the Pharisees’ own importance (v.5), reflected in the demand for deference and honours (vv.6-7). Jesus calls his followers to be different (vv.8-10). Note that this is a command – it ‘will be’ – and not simply an aspiration. Finally, like a good thriller, just when we think we know how

¹ [Revised Common Lectionary](#). (2009). Bellingham, WA: Faithlife.

the passage will end, our expectations are overturned again. If the falsity of some Pharisees undermines their teaching, so the disciples of Jesus must be truthful and self-effacing followers, and not self-promoting leaders.

Picture pointers: 'Do you like what you see in the mirror?'

Reflection questions on this week's picture



1. Do you like what you see in the mirror?
2. How much of the 'real you' do show to other people?
3. How honest are you in your conversations with others?

Live your faith

For children

Encourage the children to stop and think before they act this week – are they being true to themselves?

For young people

Post an honest selfie on social media this week and don't give in to the temptation to edit it.

For adults

Look for an opportunity to have a conversation with someone who is very different from you.

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.