

The Reverend's Ruminations - November 2020

By the time you read this, I hope that you have voted (or are about to) in the general election. It's been a long, arduous season of campaign commercials, debates, town halls, and endless pontificating by all manner of self-appointed "experts" on television and social media. 2020 has been tough in so many ways that whatever the outcome of the various political races, I pray that peace will be the ultimate outcome!

We may sometimes be tempted to think that our modern society is far removed from the dusty old stories of the Bible, but often it just requires a "parable mind set" to hear applicable teachings about seemingly old-fashioned concerns that speak right to the heart of modern settings. For example, Jesus has some tough but encouraging words for Christians in our Sunday lectionary gospel readings from Matthew's 23rd and 25th chapters during November.

On All Saint's Sunday Jesus speaks of those in places of power, who love to be noticed in the public squares and greedily gather the honors and benefits of their positions. His warning? *"All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted"* (Matthew 23:12, NRSV). Is he calling out across the centuries as well, to those currently in power or seeking to rise to power? I'd like to think so, and I hope all our candidates get the message. Here in the church, many of those whom we honor each year on the first Sunday in November did hear and heed Jesus' teaching, humbling themselves as servants of the community, the church, and their families. For this, we in turn exalt them and the memory of their humble service.

The selection for that first Sunday of November ends with verse 12, but if you continue in the 23rd chapter, you'll hear Jesus really laying into the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees of the old-guard, establishment Jewish religion of his day. After lambasting their misuse of power, restriction of average parishioners, and swearing of false oaths, he says, *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel!"* (Matthew 23:23-24, NRSV). We of course are in a season for considering tithes and offerings, but no matter whether those are in the form of valuable spices or cash contributions toward the church budget, the greater consideration across the ages is how our gifts support the "weightier matters" essential to ministry: justice, mercy, and faith.

There is much work to be done in all three of those essential areas here in our church and community, so as you reflect on the blessings and responsibilities of being a Christian in this wild and woolly world of 2020, would you also prayerfully consider how you might serve a more active role at First Congregational United Church of Christ for a time? We will soon be seeking board and council members for a new term, and I encourage each of you to take your turn in these valuable ministries of the local church. None of the board positions takes more than a few hours a month, and even our Church Council meetings are generally well under two hours—including a fair amount of laughter and occasionally some snacks!

Of course, we are always in need of short-term help in the way of kitchen workers, singers, Christmas decorators, ushers, greeters, or scripture readers as well. Some of these activities have had to change in the face of a pandemic, but the work of the church marches on. Won't you help us continue our ministries?

As we slide on toward winter, and what are bound to be some new or different holiday traditions, I pray that you and your family stay healthy, happy, and inspired in your walk of faith!

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Cory Germain