**Walk the Talk**

**All Saints Day-Pentecost 22, November 1, 2020**

Matthew 23: 1-12 Russell Mitchell-Walker

Tuesday night, our Courageous Faith group listened to the speaker, [Casper ter Kuile](https://www.caspertk.com/) talk about the connections between secular groups and spiritual or religious practices. He named that many leaders of secular groups, like yoga, crossfit, book clubs, form such community that they become spiritual leaders when members are in need or in crisis. They form their own rituals and ceremonies. He suggested that they could benefit from relationships with ministers or pastors who could mentor them in these areas. He says the church isn’t dying, it has just changed location. Casper identified that those who identify as religiously unaffiliated, which according to the latest [PEW Research](https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/09/28/religiously-unaffiliated-people-more-likely-than-those-with-a-religion-to-lean-left-accept-homosexuality/), is about 32% of the Canadian population, 2 in 3 believe in God, and 1 in 5 pray daily. Casper believes that there are very religious things happening in the secular world. One of the things that these folk, especially millennials, look for is authenticity. It is one of the reasons they are disillusioned with institutions including the church, as they don’t see authentic leadership or integrity in its doctrines and policies.

This is the challenge Jesus was making to the religious authorities in the gospel reading today. He is telling the community, to listen to the leaders, but don’t do what they do, because they are more interested in looking good, holding power, and avoiding hard work, than living out the laws and doctrines they teach. They were lacking authenticity and integrity. Jesus challenges them, and us, to be humble servants in our leadership, and in living out our faith. We are also challenged to walk the talk, to practice what we preach. Sometimes that really is a challenge.

We live in challenging times. In the midst of this pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement has erupted, along with here in Canada a number of indigenous struggles. While I was recovering from surgery this summer, I read 9 books, and finished 6, some of which were audio books I listened to while walking. Four of them were about racism. While I have learned a lot and deepened my understanding of the issues, the struggles, the challenges, it is still difficult to change and do the hard work that is necessary to address and challenge the culture of white supremacy in my day to day life, as well as discern how we as a church can do better. Sometimes it can feel overwhelming or too much, but then I remember that it is nothing compared to what Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) have to go through and live with every day. I often find myself worrying or thinking that I am not doing enough, and while that may be the case, I also realize it is better than thinking I have done enough, or I can’t or don’t want to do more than I am. I also realize that having the choice of not doing more, is also a benefit of my white privilege. When I succumb to these feelings of being overwhelmed, or that I have done enough, I am like the pharisees, holding onto power and privilege.

I wonder what we can do as a congregation to be more pro-actively anti-racist, and realize it is a journey, a process of ongoing learning, challenge, and change. This week, at an online gathering of the Denominational Council of The United Church of Canada, the commissioners passed a motion declaring that The [United Church](https://www.united-church.ca/news/church-makes-historic-declaration-become-anti-racist) become an anti-racist church. The moderator, the Right Reverend Richard Bott says: “This doesn’t mean we have achieved this goal,” “but we are taking a stand and saying we are publicly committed to eliminating systemic racism from our practices and policies.” The Church has taken two steps toward doing so, the first being hiring The Reverend **Michael Blair** as the new General Secretary, the highest staff position in the church and the first time a Black person has been in this post. The church has created an Anti-Racism and Equity Officer position and announced that Adele Halliday will be the new staff person. Brian was talking with Adele this week and she asked for prayers from our prayer chain and the church as she moves into this role. Doing so, is a sign of humility, seeking God’s guidance and support of the church, as she moves into this daunting and challenging task.

In listening to the conversation with Casper ter Kuile at Courageous Faith, we heard him talk about the question of how we might unleash people within our congregations for ministry in their contexts. He spoke about an example of a [CrossFit](https://www.crossfit.com/what-is-crossfit/) group and how it is about ethical formation – it reflects how we live in life and becomes a community of support. On a CrossFit website it says “Join the world's leading platform for health, happiness, and performance”. It promotes community as “Your support network. At more than 15,000 affiliates around the world, people encourage and motivate each other in every class as they work toward their goals. Start training with friends. Make new friends. The fun is in the community”. Casper has learned that these leaders can feel very alone when members come to them in challenging times looking for support, and seeking meaning making rituals for times in their lives that they are going through. Casper suggested that congregational leaders could find these hubs of community life in their neighbourhoods and join in to build relationships with the leaders, to be present with them, get to know them, without any agenda or expectation for them to come to church but to offer support and wisdom. This is about the church going to where the people are. While these leaders would primarily be ministers, we acknowledged in our discussion that some lay people would be able to offer support as well. We asked the critical question of what about everyone else? We know that many are involved in activities and groups in the community and could let us know about these groups, who the leaders are so others can cultivate relationships.

As I think about Casper’s reference to Crossfit groups, I am aware, that we have numerous fitness clubs in the area of the church. I have seen some of the staff come into the coffee shop when I am there. I could engage them in conversation. In order to do that I need to overcome my resistance of doing so and fear of interrupting what they are doing, or assuming they wouldn’t be interested in chatting with me. This thinking is a barrier to building relationship and practicing what I preach. When I let these fears, and resistance win, then I am like the pharisees, avoiding the hard work of being faithful.

We are called into humble servant leadership. Building relationship with one another in community, and that community is both our community and the communities outside of the church. Humility is that it is not about us, or about getting more people into the church building. It is about Jesus and the gospel, sharing the good news of love and compassion, justice and equity for all. Supporting those where they are at, and offering them love without an agenda. It is about letting God’s light shine through us. The rewards may be surprising. Who has offered humble leadership or servanthood in your life? I invite you to reflect on these questions in breakout rooms.

1. What are the things which prevent God's light from shining through us?
2. What are the things that allow God's light to shine through us?
3. Who has been a humble servant to you? Think of a saint you have known or still know. Describe that saint to those in your breakout room and explain the influence they have had on you.

As you came back, I could see the light shining through many of you. I wonder how many of you were named by others? I have the privilege of seeing so much of what happens in your lives and how much so many of you do, both for the congregation and the wider community, that I know there is much light shining in our community and beyond. May we celebrate those who have gone before us and been a light for us. May God’s light continue to shine through us as we seek to be humble servants, who walk the talk.