**11/5/23**

**Know what something is, and know what it does.**

**Matthew 23:1-12**

Let’s start things out here this morning with the prayer that is offered as an alternative in our Lectionary for All Saints Sunday. Feel free to bow your heads as we pray together… “Almighty God, you have knit your people together in one communion in the mystical body of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Grant us grace to follow your blessed saints in lives of faith and commitment, and to know the inexpressible joys you have prepared for those who love you, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**” (1)

Today is definitely a day of remembrance. It is a day where we retrieve and honor our memories of those that have left this temporary earthly life and dwelling place. We remember those that have entered the church triumphant since last All Saints Day. We honor their lives and memories as we play a sound and announce each individual’s name during our Prayers of Intercession later in our Worship Service. Today, whether we try to or not, we also get flooded with memories of those that have passed away over several years as well. Today does indeed become a day in which we often smile or cry, and sometimes do both quite honestly, as we recall the very memories, feelings, and thoughts of those people who touched our lives and our hearts in a special way. We do indeed miss them, but by keeping their memories alive, and living out what they have imparted on us, we are honoring and respecting them. We are also reminded that… “For Lutherans, All Saints resonates with the conviction that in Christ every saint is a sinner and every sinner a saint, simul justus et peccator. Lutherans especially remember on this feast that it is God’s grace, apart from our works, that makes us saints. We find lasting rest only in the mercy of God.” (2)

Now, you know I could have come at you with the alternative texts of the day in commemoration of All Saints Sunday. I could have been up here reading the Beatitudes for our Gospel Reading where… “Jesus provides a unique description of those who are blessed with God’s favor. His teaching is surprising and shocking to those who seek wealth, fame, and control over others.” (1) Not bad Gospel Reading and Sermon points at all. Instead, I chose to stick with the text of the day in an effort to come at things from a different angle. Well, I will admit that I could have not been any more wrong in my approach. I learned that very few people have written sermons on today’s particular Gospel Reading, or at least very few people have posted them on-line. Sermon Central provided me with only one Lutheran Sermon. So, I looked through the Episcopal, and a few other faith-based sermons. Out of all the stuff I found only one really offered me anything I could use, or felt comfortable with. So, I then looked at a few other websites for some help and support with my research, and I was thankful Working Preacher had a few offerings I could read and utilize. Thankfully, I also have the desk edition of Sundays and Seasons Preaching where I was able to gain some insight and understanding into things for today as well.

I do indeed love to read and learn, but I admit that I have struggles with comprehension, and often reread over things several times. This can be helpful as much as it can be hurtful. I can overelaborate or overcomplicate some things that are so plain and simple. So, when I have posed this to a few of my teachers and professors over the years I was often taught that if I struggled to understand, and did not have much to read or support a better understanding of it as additional research, then I needed to break down what I was reading by its parts, sort of like dissecting it to figure out what made it tick or work. Shockingly enough I have been reminded of this many times in my current seminary class as well. I reflected back on all my class notes and could see my professor often related back to the fact that even Martin Luther and several other teachers, preachers, and researchers often focused on finding a way to **know what something is, and know what it does.** Plain and simple enough. So, that is exactly what we are going to do here with today’s Gospel Reading.

I encourage you to have your bulletins open and feel free to follow along with this break down. Let us also focus on what my seminary professor reminds me of; **know what something is, and know what it does.**

So, let us first focus on verse one. Jesus is not talking to the Pharisees and Scribes like he had been in a lot of the texts over the past few weeks and months. He is talking to the crowds and the disciples.

Our next focus and breakdown will be verses two through four that speak of how… “the Pharisees and the Sadducees love authority, but not service. Jesus says they sit in Moses’ seat. This is a way of saying that they occupy the teaching authority originally conferred to Moses by God. That is why Jesus tells the people to follow what the Pharisees tell the people to observe. This is a striking endorsement, but it is qualified by this: do not do as they do, for they say and do not do.” (3) We are indeed instructed or reminded that… “Jesus’ followers are told to listen to and obey what the Pharisees and scribes teach from the Torah, since they “sit on Moses’ seat.” Yet Jesus will immediately qualify the authority of the Pharisees: they themselves do not practice what they preach.” (5)

Now, we shift our focus and move on to verse five. Of course, we also get a term that most of us probably have no clue what it means. So, that is exactly why I had to pump the brakes and look it up before I even moved on in my own reading. What in the world are Phylacteries? I learned that… “What the Jews did was to take a small scrap of parchment, write a phrase or verse from the Torah on it, roll it up tightly, and place it in a small, cube-shaped box, which they would then strap to their foreheads and to their left wrist. It was a visible way of showing that they knew and understood and were complying with Moses’ teaching.” (3) That is definitely much different than what most of us do when we sit down to read our Bibles for sure. Now, to make things clear here Jesus was not saying there was anything wrong with this very practice. However, … “What Jesus was condemning is this: the Pharisees and Sadducees were making their phylacteries very large, so that no one could possibly miss seeing them. And, they were making the tassels on their garments exceedingly long so that no one could possibly miss seeing them. And, the reason they did this is so that everyone WOULD see them and think, “Oh, my! How holy that fellow must be.”” (3) We are reminded and cautioned that the love for approval from others can be very dangerous, and Jesus cautions us all on this very thing here.

We now move on to verses six through ten. We learn that… “It was not just the reputation they lusted for, it was all the perks that come with it: the best seats at the feasts, the front seats in the synagogue, the greetings in the market places, the way that people would hail them “Rabbi! Rabbi!”” (3) “Over and over, Jesus drives home the point that behind any father, behind any teacher, behind any rabbi, stands God the Father of all Fatherhood in heaven, and the one whom this Father has sent, his Son Jesus Christ.” (3) The title and privilege may be what they foolishly thought made them who they were, but they were forgetting exactly why and how this was even bestowed upon them. Furthermore, they were taking it on as some type of badge of honor to get things they really did not necessarily even deserve or need. This further clouded their judgement at times whether they realized it or not. Whether we realize it or not… “We love the trappings of living according to God’s word. We set ourselves up for applause. But it is easier to appear pious or to instruct others regarding their faults than to implement God’s commands in our own lives.” (4)

Lastly, we focus on verses eleven and twelve where we learn the true calling card and focus of all of this. To be a servant, and to be humble in order to be exalted, and not the other way around. “The attitude of a servant is more appropriate, for the servant shapes their actions according to the master’s will. Jesus shows us a master whose expectations are high, but they are guided first and foremost by mercy.” (4) We are forever reminded that… “The greatest among us took our flesh and became the greatest servant. He served us by giving his very life so that we might participate in the divine life and so that our lives might be transformed to conform to the life of the greatest servant. (1) Furthermore, we must remember that… “The call to serve others comes to church leaders and to every baptized Christian. We follow Jesus, both by living as servant and by acknowledging God as our source and authority…” (1)

I hope these breakdowns helped you out a bit today. I definitely know this was a different approach than I typically take to things. I am learning and changing through my studies and continued experience, and I never hope to confuse you or the Word and the Message. I also pray and hope that our memories remain vivid of those who have entered the church triumphant. As I said before, we do indeed miss them, but by keeping their memories alive, and living out what they have imparted on us, we are honoring and respecting them, and more importantly we are honoring and respecting God’s creation.

Amen.

**References**

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November 2, 2008

**All Saints Day**

All Saints celebrates the baptized people of God, living and dead, who are the body

of Christ. As November heralds the dying of the landscape in many northern regions,

the readings and liturgy call us to remember all who have died in Christ and whose

baptism is complete. At the Lord’s table we gather with the faithful of every time and

place, trusting that the promises of God will be fulfilled and that all tears will be wiped

away in the new Jerusalem.

**Matthew 23:1-12**

Micah declares God’s condemnation of those who abhor justice. Jesus warns

against hypocrisy. Paul urges the Thessalonians to lead a life worthy of God.

Called to be humble servants, we gather for worship, seeking justice and

welcoming all people to share the banquet of life.

Jesus encourages his disciples to obey the words of Moses they hear from their

teachers but to shun the hypocrisy and pretension of those who do not practice

what they teach.

1Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, 2“The scribes and the Pharisees

sit on Moses’ seat; 3therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do

not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. 4They 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. 5They do all their deeds to

be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long.

6They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the

synagogues, 7and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have

people call them rabbi. 8But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one

teacher, and you are all students. 9And call no one your father on earth, for you

have one Father—the one in heaven. 10Nor are you to be called instructors, for

you have one instructor, the Messiah. 11The greatest among you will be your

servant. 12All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble

themselves will be exalted.”