**From Hypocrisy to Authenticity**

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Matthew 23: 1-12 Russell Mitchell-Walker

This past few weeks, we have been hearing about how the Liberal government has made a decision to [suspend the carbon tax](https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/carbon-tax-exemption-trudeau-analysis-wherry-1.7016971) on housing heated by oil in Atlantic Canada. The rationale is that heating oil is much more expensive than other forms of heating across the country and they have expanded a program to support those using oil for heating to install electric heat pumps. While the Conservatives and New Democrats complain that this is unfair to the rest of Canadians and it seems to some to be vote buying, to others concerned about climate change it seems a backward step if carbon pricing is to be seen as a useful tool to curb fossil fuel use and provide finances for supporting greener alternatives and transition. From a government that tries to present itself as a leader in climate justice, it just seems hypocritical.

After a meeting I was at this week, planning for a warming centre in Regina, a few of us were talking and the former Saskatchewan party MLA Mark Docherty was mentioned (I can’t remember in what context) and we named how he was the only Saskatchewan Party member who for years would participate in the Pride Parade. This past year there were more Saskatchewan Party members in the parade and one of the folk in the conversation named how they were very vocal about their disdain in seeing them there, and encouraging them to live out their support more in their Party policies. It is clear now, following the pronoun policy and parental rights bill, that they were only there for appearances and not real support. It seems very hypocritical.

In our gospel reading today, Jesus points out that the Scribes and Pharisees are hypocrites. He has been in the temple and experienced them challenging him, trying to trap him, and he has challenged them and told parables about the importance of doing the will of God, bearing fruits of the kingdom, and resisting the empire. He now tells his disciples and the people listening to listen to them and do what they say, for they are teaching the laws of Moses and what God is calling them to do, but don’t do what they do because they do not practice what they preach. They expect others to follow the rules to the letter of the law, without regard to the burden it creates and do nothing to ease the burden. They put up appearances doing things to be seen by others, but in reality, are only doing it for their own gain, and to make their way up the ladder of leadership. Jesus names that servanthood and humility are important, being part of and climbing your way up the hierarchy, is not.

In reading the commentaries for this passage, most of them name the dangers of using this passage to be critical of the Jews. Too often this passage has been used in antisemitic ways, to be critical of all Jews. Those who do this are missing one important fact of the story. Jesus is a Jew, speaking to the Jewish community, about their leadership. To be critical of the leadership is not to be critical of the whole community. We seem to be missing this fact as well during the war in Israel and Palestine. To be critical of the Israeli government killing innocent civilians in Gaza, including women and children, is not being critical of all Jews in the nation. We know that many Jews do not support the government and many are working for peace with the Palestinians. In like manner, condemning the brutal attacks by Hamas, is not to condemn all Palestinians. We condemn all death and destruction, as would Jesus. Violence is never the way to solve differences or respond to injustice. On this day that we also mark Remembrance Day, we continue to pray for peace, for a ceasefire, for Israelis and Jewish people as well as Palestinians and Muslims around the world, all of whom are suffering because of this war. To remember, is to end all wars.

In challenging hypocrisy, Jesus is upholding authenticity. This has been a challenge to the church for a long time. It is a criticism those outside of the church have of Christianity, and religion. Young people especially, these days see through inauthenticity and hypocrisy. This past week, for our final session of Bible Stories for Grown-ups, we were blessed to have with us online at the Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Books group the author of the book, Josh Scott. Josh is the pastor at Grace Pointe Church, in Nashville Tennessee. At one point in the conversation, he was sharing about conversations with young people who have been coming to the church and why they decided to attend. They tell him they are looking for a community that lives out what it preaches, that is active in the community and is doing ministry, living out its faith, not just talking about it. Another time in the conversation he talked about how they were worshiping in a different space, an old theatre, because of a fire in their building. There was a big stage, and it just didn’t feel right to him. They then got another space where all were on the same level, and it felt more equitable. So much so that when some suggested getting a small stage, he said, “absolutely not, it is important for us all to be on the same level, to be seen as all in this together, that some are not better than the others. He seems to be embodying in his ministry some of what Jesus is saying in this passage today.

It can be very easy to point fingers at others’ hypocrisy but what about us? How much do we walk the talk or practice what we preach? I think many of us try to do so. It can also be very difficult to do so in the world we live. I know I am very committed to climate change, but we have not gotten an electric vehicle or solar panels on our house yet. Financial barriers and lack of subsidies make it a challenge. It can be a challenge to live out our values when we are enmeshed in a system of injustice, a system that is based on exploitation – exploitation of land and resources and exploitation of people who are vulnerable and marginalized. In the midst of this, we do our best, and continue to work for justice and live as authentically as we can. It is good that God’s grace is abundant, and God understands our realities.

So may we continue to work toward the kingdom, here on earth. May we remember those who gave their lives in war, and work to end all wars, for peace with justice. May we remember that criticizing a government is not criticizing all its peoples. May we name hypocrisy where we see it, seek authenticity, and live authentically as best as we can. And may the grace of God, the love of Christ, and the guidance of the Spirit be with us always.