**“Significant Teaching—Tuesday of Holy Week”**

#

Matthew 23:1-12

 Lenten Midweek 4

In the name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

You and I can learn a lot by listening to various teachers in our lives. **In** **school**, we can be blessed by listening and learning from knowledgeable **teachers**, and later **professors** in college. In **the workplace**, we can learn a lot by listening to those who’ve been working in our field for more years than we have, accumulating **experience** that can be of benefit to us to learn from our work.

You and I can also learn by **watching others**. Some of what we learn by watching can be good or bad. Some we can notice as harmful or negative. There, we learn what **not to do** as much as we can learn what **to do by good examples**.

We can learn of **humility** by watching how humble people respond to some accolade that comes their way. They might (for instance) deflect that or make sure that they point praise to others who’ve helped them (taking the focus off of them). In some, we can notice how the needs of others seem more important than their own.

But we can learn, also, about **arrogance and conceit** from people. We can see self-promotion and a knack to always steer conversations back to themselves. This breathes of a self-centeredness and, maybe, superiority, so smugness that we can learn to know how ugly it could be in us.

In the Gospel reading for tonight, Jesus (always teaching) refers to both learning the Good and the bad when He spoke to the crowds and to his disciples:

**His Significant Teaching to impart to His Followers is, both,**

**What Not to Do but also Who’s Done for Us.**

**I**

It was Tuesday of Holy Week where Jesus is just three days from being arrested, convicted, crucified, killed, and then buried. He called attention, that day, to the “scribes and the Pharisees who sit on Moses’ seat” of presumed authority. It’s thought that this particular (**literal, maybe**) seat was a specific piece of furniture in a synagogue. Others think it not **literal**, but a **figurative** way of teaching that aligns with what Moses taught. But we don’t know for sure which it was, except that it was an honored posture of authoritative teaching respected and listened to.

But Jesus cautioned the crowds and his disciples, “So **do and observe whatever they tell you**, but **not the works they do**”. Where the scribes and the Pharisees are, in fact, reading and teaching the **actual words** and **lessons** of Moses, people crowds and his disciples should listen and learn. But where their actions don’t match their words, learn from their hypocrisy. “Guard your own hypocrisy” Jesus would be saying … and notice and learn of humility from what **should be**.

The Lord teaches about arrogance from the arrogant:

“They do all their deeds to be seen by others”. Scribes and Pharisees often wanted **public** recognition rather than, just, the pleasure of God. They wanted the praise of men for even their practice of religion, and they wanted to be recognized as an example in the eyes of people and not God:

“They make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long” (I had to look up phylacteries, and they were religious little boxes where they’d **carry** God’s Word, but seldom **live it themselves apparently**). Tied around a forehead or arms, these that day almost tattoos of garb became **marks of piety that people could see** whether or not the texts they represented penetrated the skin and heart. Blue tassels reminded them of the Ten Commandments, yet most forgot to love. By making their “**phylacteries broad**” and their “**fringes long**”, the point was to draw attention to **themselves**. Concern was for image. It was a worship, really, of **self-focus** … **self-centeredness**.

“They love the **place of honor at feasts** and the **best seats in the synagogues**”. The scribes and Pharisees wanted seen, and in the privileges that came with their positions. The best seats were seen and heard by all. A lowly seat was off to the side, not for their appearance but for the appearance, rather, of God for the lowly who needed Him.

But they loved “greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi **by others**”. They loved their **public recognition**. Popularity was theirs. But their popularity was for this world … and jeopardized the next. It was, though, what they were concerned with.

**II**

“**Do not observe what they do**,” Jesus taught the crowds and his disciples. Do not learn to emulate how they act. The fact that Jesus warned the crowds and his disciples then about pride-filled behaviors should warn us as well. It’s the nature of sin to focus on ourselves and promote ourselves:

We work (even here) on a project within the church and, yet, **stew** because we’re not noticed in the way of praise … so decide not to help out again.

Others get mentioned for their accomplishments yet we **resent that** since we’ve **missed that recognition of us**.

Worse, we may, even, quietly think ourselves more-worthy than others of blessing from God because of what we know about the Bible or think we do about it.

A feeling of **spiritual** **superiority** (let alone the secular kind) can happen taking our eyes off the Savior and to focus on ourselves for (we think) Him.

**III**

Jesus teaches His hearers that “the greatest among you shall be your **servant” (but that invisibly of duty rather than of notice)**. How ironic it is that the One teaching on this Tuesday of Holy Week is **God-become-man** **/ Jesus**. The One who actually is deserving of glory, honor, and worship is the One dutifully headed for death, pouring Himself out so as to fill the sinful repentant. Paul writes in Philippians that Jesus is He “who, though in the form of God, didn’t **count equality with God a thing to be grasped**, **emptying Himself**, **taking the form of a servant**.” “He humbled Himself by **BECOMING OBEDIENT TO THE POINT OF DEATH, EVEN DEATH ON A CROSS**” …

… which covered our sins. Even our own stupid and undeserved pride and arrogance, His death covered it. What we’ve done and are (and let ourselves be), Jesus wiped clean by His bloodshed and death … no sin and guilt repented and washed out of us through baptism remains because of His sacrifice. God’s removed our flaws “as far as the east is from the west”. The One who humbled Himself **took care of it all for us and in our place**.

And that’s the same Jesus who says that “The greatest **among you** shall be **your servant**”. **HE** **has been and is** **the greatest to** **be among us** . . . serving all by his life, death, and resurrection, and offer to supply us as Lord. ….

We can, **obviously**, learn a **great deal** both by listening to our Savior’s teaching and by watching the example of what He does. May God keep our eyes forever focused on Jesus and not ourselves. May we be servants of God and our neighbor in humility, un-noticed that any of it is anything but duty. As Jesus said, “Whoever humbles himself will be exalted”. That exaltation we **wait for in the coming perfection of the Kingdom of Heaven**. In +Jesus’ name. Amen.