

Matthew 6.1-6, 16-18
Being Aware of Our Motives
WRCOB 7.14.24

A man who struggled with many sins
Sought membership in a super religious church.

The pastor discouraged him from joining
Stating that though they loved him it wasn't a good fit

Finally, the man knowing he was not wanted
Said that he would go home and pray about it.

The following Sunday he returned to church.

"Well," asked the pastor
"Did the Lord speak to you?"

"Yes sir, he did," The old man answered.
"God told me it wasn't any use."

"He'd been trying to get in this church for years."

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The truth is that the church
Has been the brunt of jokes since its inception.

And most of the jokes focus on its hypocrisy.

The reason people joke
About the church being full of hypocrites

Is because, unfortunately
The church is full of hypocrites!

But what better place to be on a Sunday morning
For sinners and hypocrites alike!

Jesus knew it and had something to say about it.

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Our passages today
Center on three spiritual disciplines

The disciplines of charitable giving
Prayer and fasting.

But we're not going to study the disciplines.

We're going to look at how
The religious leaders of Jesus' day
Practiced these spiritual disciplines.

He warned the crowds there on that mountain
Not to be like "them".

Matthew 6:2a, 5, 16a

² "Whenever you give to the poor, don't blow your trumpet as the hypocrites do

⁵ "When you pray, don't be like hypocrites

¹⁶ "And when you fast, don't put on a sad face like the hypocrites

The scribes and Pharisees wanted to make a big deal
Of their religiosity
Showing everyone how virtuous they were.

The same things continues to this day.

I won't point a finger at any church leader
And their desire to come across as super-religious
Or pretending to be something they're not.

Because when I point a finger at them
There's three fingers pointing back at me.

Religious leaders, heck, maybe all of us
Want to look good and appear all together.

But let's face it, we're not. No one is.

And in that sense, we're all hypocrites.

That's why I like the down-to-earth
Down home kind of preachers.

They feel to me genuine and sincere.

And that's why, my goal is to be real.

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This word hypocrite is taken from the Greek
Hypokritēs

It means actor.

Greek actors commonly wore theatrical masks.

The meaning then evolved
Into someone who is two-faced
Someone pretending to be something else..

The word is used 17 times in the NT.

And guess who uses it the most?

Yea. Jesus.

False piety, pretense is what it is.

Those who talk the talk
But not walk the walk.

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Now, to be sure
Jesus did not criticize
The practice of charity, prayer, and fasting.

He criticized the motivation underlying the practices.

Augustine noted

It is not the being seen of men that is wrong, but doing these things for the PURPOSE of being seen of men.

The problem with the hypocrite is his motivation. He does not want to be holy; he only wants to seem to be holy.

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Now, it's important to understand clearly
The real nature of religious duplicity.

Religious hypocrisy is NOT
Failing to live up to the teachings of Jesus.

We all fail in that category.

Religious hypocrisy is *pretending*

To live up to the standards of the gospel.

Giving the appearance

One is holy, when one isn't.

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Jesus saw through their pretentiousness.

He questioned their true motivations.

What are you doing?

Are you worshiping and serving the Lord?

Or seeking admiration from the congregation?

It was the latter Jesus witnessed and bemoaned.

They didn't care they were faking it

Before God and humanity

Just as long as the people were impressed.

Jesus counters by saying

Genuine 'acts of righteousness'

Are intended for God's eyes only.

Our charitable deeds

Our public prayers

Our fasting

Should be done for God alone to see and recognize

Not to enhance our own public image.

They've received their reward;
They sought public approval and got it

Nothing more.

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Jesus was incensed by their conduct

Not simply because

They were pretending to be something
They were not

But because they were using God

As a means to make themselves feel superior.

Matthew 23:5 CEB

⁵ Everything they do, they do to be noticed by others.

Jesus warned them.

“This is not the way it should be.

Don't let your left hand know
What your right hand is giving”

“Go into your private place to pray”

“When you fast, make it look like you're not.”

~~

Jesus says to us today beware of what motivates us.

By pretending to be something we're not

By making a big show of our piety
We end up as frauds.

And in the end, we only hurt ourselves.

We end up trying to hide our true selves
From God and from others.

And end up feeling isolated and alone.
And no where to turn for help.

We've block ourselves
From the healing powers of God
And from the church's support system.

We need to stop pretending and get real.

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A first-time visitor who comes to church
Looking for something to heal the brokenness
To fill the emptiness
Leave worship with all kinds of impressions

They might leave thinking

“Wow, these people have it all together
They have no worries
They have no problems
They are not weighed down by sin.”

“They would never understand my problems.”

“I don't belong here.”

OR, they might leave thinking

“These people are completely out of touch with reality

“They have no clue as to the true human condition.”

“They live bubble-wrapped from the rest of humanity.”

“I don’t belong here.”

OR, they might leave thinking

“These people are complete hypocrites
Unwilling to confess or confront
The sins and weaknesses found in them.”

“Why do they pretend all is fine?”

“I definitely don’t belong here.”

Or, they might leave thinking

“These people are sincere and honest
Aware of their shortcomings
They seek God’s mercy and guidance.”

“They don’t pretend to have it all together
Because they know they don’t.”

“I belong here.”

~~

Authenticity!

That’s what we need.

Brene Brown

“Authenticity is the daily practice of letting go of who we think we’re supposed to be and embracing who we are.”

We need to be true.

True to ourselves
True to others
True to God.

~~

I remember a time following worship
We were sharing informally

When a person, touched by the Holy Spirit
Shared some deeply personal wounds
From their childhood.

It was an honest and genuine sharing from the heart.

It was a difficult moment.

At one point, the person apologized
For making such a scene

Saying
“I don’t know the church’s protocol for such a thing.”

This, my sisters and brothers, is the church’s protocol

Church is to be a safe and loving environment.

A place where we can be authentically human.

A place we can share deeply our hurts
Without being judged.

A place where we share our brokenness
With others who might be broken too.

A place where you don't have to pretend.

True healing and holiness comes
When we open ourselves to God
And to one another.

There is freedom in that!

Jesus said, the truth shall set you free.

Jesus designed the church to be just that:
A safe haven, a refuge
A sanctuary of grace.

One way we can be real
And honestly approach our loving God
Is in our Bread and Cup Communion.

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We come to the Lord's Table.

But let's not come with masks and façade.

Let's come as we are, broken and beautiful
Vulnerable and hopeful.

Let's come confessing our weaknesses
Knowing that in this space
We share the shared struggles

Knowing in this space God's grace abounds.

God doesn't need us to be perfect.

God needs us to be real.

Let's come to the Lord's Table
Seeking to be truly seen
Truly loved, and truly healed

Through the God who loved us first
And gave his all
So that we may have it all!