



Liturgical Day: Ash Wednesday  
Date: February 25, 2009  
Sermon Title: Where Your Treasure Is

public piety  
brings public recognition  
better to seek God

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We are gathered here, around the cross of Jesus Christ, to begin a journey. It is a forty day journey. It is reminiscent of other journeys measured by forty:

- Noah rode out the storm in the ark for forty days and forty nights before the rains subsided.
- Israel wandered in the desert for forty years before entering into the promised land.
- Moses spent forty days on Mount Sinai before bringing the ten commandments down to God's people.
- Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness, being tempted by the devil, before beginning his public ministry.

Each of these journeys measured by forty was a purposeful time. As we think about what took place on these journeys, we are aware that:

- They were times of preparation.
- They were times of learning about God's will.
- They were times of new beginnings.
- They were times of transition between what was and what will come to be.

Our forty day journey called Lent is modeled after these others

- Lent is a time when we prepare for the coming of Easter, and the celebration of the resurrection.
- Lent is a time when we turn our attention to the scriptures, and more intently seek God's will for our lives.
- Lent is a time when we experience new beginnings, as we welcome new faith patterns and new spiritual disciplines into the rhythm of our lives.
- Let is a time when we repent. Repent is a Greek word that means to have a complete transformation in our minds, and to begin moving in a new direction. During this season we ask God to help us turn from our sin, and seek the life that God wants for us.

Did you hear what those sentences have in common? They all are active sentences. They all describe what you and I are called to do during these forty days. They are a prescription for us: one that the church issues each year. And so during these weeks we turn our attention towards the classic disciplines of our faith: repentance, fasting, prayer and works of love.

But the question at hand as we begin is this: why do we do this? Why, each year, do we make

FIRST LESSON  
JOEL 2:1-2, 12-17

OR

ISAIAH 58:1-12

PSALM

PSALM 51:1-17

SECOND LESSON

2<sup>ND</sup> CORINTHIANS

5:20B-6:10

GOSPEL LESSON

ST. MATTHEW 6:1-6, 16-21

PRAYER OF THE DAY

ALMIGHTY AND EVER-LIVING  
GOD, YOU HATE NOTHING YOU  
HAVE MADE AND YOU FORGIVE  
THE SINS OF ALL WHO ARE  
PENITENT. CREATE IN US NEW  
AND HONEST HEARTS, SO THAT,  
TRULY REPENTING OF OUR SINS,  
WE MAY OBTAIN FROM YOU, THE  
GOD OF ALL MERCY, FULL  
PARDON AND FORGIVENESS;  
THROUGH YOUR SON, JESUS  
CHRIST OUR LORD, WHO LIVES  
AND REIGNS WITH YOU AND THE  
HOLY SPIRIT, ONE GOD, NOW  
AND FOREVER. AMEN.

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God's work. Our hands.

time in our lives and make room in our homes for these practices that are less a part of who we are during the other forty six years of the year? The answer to that question is the main point of the Gospel reading that we will hear in just a couple of minutes.

Matthew 6 is the middle chapter in the three chapter long *Sermon on the Mount*. In this sermon, Jesus deals with what it means to be a person of faith. Specifically, he takes a look at religious behavior. He notes that there are many religious people in his day, but that some of them are acting in ways that are hypocritical. At the heart of Ancient Israel's religious life were three disciplines: charitable giving, prayer and fasting. Involvement in these kinds of activities was essential for anyone who wanted to be growing in faith.

But being involved in them didn't necessarily mean that a person would grow in faith, because people took up the tasks of charitable giving and prayer and fasting for a variety of reasons. Some of them did so to call attention to themselves, so that other people would take notice of them. Others did so because they were committed to whatever took place in the Synagogue or the Temple, and they wanted to fit in. Others did so because they felt obligated to do these things. In each of these cases, the motivation was selfish. Jesus called them hypocrites because they claimed they were seeking to glorify God – some even believed that they were glorifying God – but the truth is they really wanted to glorify themselves. They wanted others to notice their religiosity, or they wanted to be impressed with their own level of faithfulness, and their disciplined giving and praying and fasting became self-serving. They were doing it for what they could get out of it. They were doing it for what effect it could have on their lives and their reputations and their fortunes.

Jesus' response to them is instructive. He doesn't try to convince them that they are wrong. He doesn't even try to change them. He simply says, "If you set your sights that low, then that's all you'll experience." Those who use the disciplines of our faith to elevate themselves in comparison with others, have already received all the benefit there is to receive from that kind of behavior. But, Jesus teaches, those who use the disciplines of faith to deepen their relationship with God, and to strengthen their trust in God's promises, will benefit in ways that last into eternity. They may not receive any benefit or reward in this life, but they will grow into a relationship with God which can survive even the finality of death itself.

I want to invite you to join us during this season of Lent, as we try to enter into the disciplines of our faith from that perspective. That is one of the reasons we re-arranged this space for the season. For the next five weeks, we plan to gather together around the foot of the cross and remind ourselves that that we are a cross-centered and Christ-centered community of faith. As I said in my mid-week devotional message yesterday evening, when we come here, we come to kneel together at the foot of the cross.

- We come with gratitude, awed at our Savior's willingness to give his life for us.
- We come with grief, kneeling at the foot of the cross and acknowledging our deep need for forgiveness and new life.
- We come with humility, remember that in the eyes of God we are all equally sinful - all equally in need of grace.
- We come with hunger, gathering around the table to be fed with the real presence of Christ.
- We come with peace, knowing that God welcomes us just as we are, forgives us and renews us despite our unworthiness, and strengthens us to be sent into the world as a reflection of Christ's love.

Join us for Lent this year at Saint Peter where you can gather in gratitude, grief, humility, hunger and peace. And know that the God who meets us at the beginning of this Lenten journey with those ancient and haunting words, "remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return" is also the God who commands us to speak to one another, at the conclusion of this journey, with those grace-filled and freeing words, "in obedience to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins."

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Brothers and Sisters: God created us to experience the joy of faith, to love all humanity, and to live in

harmony with all of creation. But sin separates us from God, our neighbors, and creation, and so we do not enjoy the life our Creator intended for us. Also, by our sin we grieve our God, who does not desire us to come under judgment, but to live.

As disciples of the Lord Jesus, we are called to struggle against everything that leads us away from the love of God and neighbor. Repentance, fasting, prayer, and works of love - the disciplines of Lent - help us to wage our spiritual warfare. I invite you, therefore, to commit yourselves to this struggle and confess your sins, asking God for strength to persevere in your Lenten discipline. <sup>i</sup>

David J. Risendal, Pastor (February 25, 2009)

Gospel Lesson; English Text: <sup>ii</sup>

[Jesus said,] <sup>6.1</sup> "Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. <sup>2</sup> So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. <sup>3</sup> But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup> so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. <sup>5</sup> And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. <sup>6</sup> But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

<sup>16</sup> "And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. <sup>17</sup> But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup> so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. <sup>19</sup> Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; <sup>20</sup> but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." <sup>iii</sup>

Greek Text:

<sup>6.1</sup> Προσέχετε [δὲ] τὴν δικαιοσύνην ὑμῶν μὴ ποιεῖν μπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων πρὸς τὸ θεαθῆναι αὐτοῖς εἰ δὲ μὴ γε, μισθὸν οὐκ ἔχετε παρὰ τῷ πατρὶ ὑμῶν τῷ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς. <sup>2</sup> Ὅταν οὖν ποιῆς ἐλεημοσύνην, μὴ σαλπίζῃς μπροσθεν σου, ὡσπερ οἱ ὑποκριταὶ ποιοῦσιν ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς καὶ ἐν ταῖς ῥύμαις, ὅπως δοξασθῶσιν ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ἀπέχουσιν τὸν μισθὸν αὐτῶν. <sup>3</sup> σοὺ δὲ ποιοῦντος ἐλεημοσύνην μὴ γνώτω ἡ ἀριστερὰ σου τί ποιεῖ ἡ δεξιὰ σου, <sup>4</sup> ὅπως ἡ σου ἡ ἐλεημοσύνη ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ καὶ ὁ πατήρ σου ὁ βλέπων ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ ἀποδώσει σοι. <sup>5</sup> Καὶ ταν προσεύχησθε, οὐκ σεσθε ὡς οἱ ὑποκριταὶ, ὅτι φιλοῦσιν ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς καὶ ἐν ταῖς γωνίαις τῶν πλατειῶν ἐστῶτες προσεύχεσθαι, ὅπως φανῶσιν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ἀπέχουσιν τὸν μισθὸν αὐτῶν. <sup>6</sup> σὺ δὲ ταν προσεύχη, εεσελθε εἰς τὸ ταμεῖον σου καὶ κλείσας τὴν θύραν σου πρόσευξαι τῷ πατρὶ σου τῷ ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ καὶ ὁ πατήρ σου ὁ βλέπων ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ ἀποδώσει σοι.

<sup>16</sup> Ὅταν δὲ νηστεύητε, μὴ γίνεσθε ὡς οἱ ὑποκριταὶ σκυθρωποὶ, ἀφανίζουσιν γὰρ τὰ πρόσωπα αὐτῶν πῶς φανῶσιν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις νηστεύοντες ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ἀπέχουσιν τὸν μισθὸν αὐτῶν. <sup>17</sup> σὺ δὲ νηστεύων λειψαί σου τὴν κεφαλὴν καὶ τὸ πρόσωπον σου νίψαι, <sup>18</sup> ὅπως μὴ φανῆς τοῖς ἀνθρώποις νηστεύων ἀλλὰ τῷ πατρὶ σου τῷ ἐν τῷ κρυφαίῳ καὶ ὁ πατήρ σου ὁ βλέπων ἐν τῷ

<sup>i</sup> From the Ash Wednesday Liturgy, *Lutheran Book of Worship; Minister's Desk Edition* (©1979, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, Minnesota), page 129.

<sup>ii</sup> A list of Bible lessons for the coming weeks is available at [http://www.elca.org/dcm/worship/church\\_year/lectionary.html](http://www.elca.org/dcm/worship/church_year/lectionary.html).

<sup>iii</sup> St. Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21, New Revised Standard Version Bible (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

κρυφαίῳ ἀποδώσει σοι. <sup>19</sup> Μὴ θησαυρίζετε ὑμῖν θησαυροὺς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ὅπου σὴς καὶ βρώσις ἀφανίζει καὶ ἡ κλέπτει διωρῶσσοισιν καὶ κλέπτουσιν <sup>20</sup> θησαυρίζετε δὲ ὑμῖν θησαυροὺς ἐν οὐρανῷ, ὅπου οὐτε σὴς οὐτε βρώσις ἀφανίζει καὶ ἡ κλέπτει οὐ διωρῶσσοισιν οὐδὲ κλέπτουσιν <sup>21</sup> ὅπου γὰρ ἐστὶν ὁ θησαυρὸς σου, ἐκεῖ ἔσται καὶ ἡ καρδίᾳ σου. <sup>iv</sup>

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<sup>iv</sup> St. Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21, The Greek New Testament, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart). To display the Greek text correctly, choose Palatino Linotype font.