

**“Hypocrisy Hurts”**

Meditation Preached by The Rev. Jennifer Cameron

November 1, 2020 – St. Columba Presbyterian Church, Belleville

**Hymns for Worship Video – November 1, 2020**

“All the Way my Saviour Leads Me” #699 in the Book of Praise

All the way my Saviour leads me  
What have I to ask beside  
Can I doubt His tender mercy  
Who through life has been my Guide  
Heav'nly peace divinest comfort  
Here by faith in Him to dwell  
For I know whate'er befall me  
Jesus doeth all things well

All the way my Saviour leads me  
Cheers each winding path I tread  
Gives me grace for ev'ry trial  
Feeds me with the living bread  
Though my weary steps may falter  
And my soul athirst may be  
Gushing from the Rock before me  
Lo a spring of joy I see

All the way my Saviour leads me  
O the fullness of His love  
Perfect rest to me is promised  
In my Father's house above  
When my spirit clothed immortal  
Wings its flight to realms of day  
This my song through endless ages  
Jesus led me all the way

*Fanny Jane Crosby / Robert Lowry*

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“To Show by Touch and Word” #763 in the Book of Praise

To show by touch and word devotion to the earth,  
To hold in full regard all life that comes to birth,  
We need O God the will to find  
The good You had of old in mind

Renew our minds to choose the things that matter most  
Our hearts to long for truth, till pride itself is lost  
For every challenge that we face  
We need Your guidance and Your grace

Let love from day to day be yardstick, rule and norm,  
And let our lives portray your word in human form  
Now come with us that we may have  
Your wits about us where we live.

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**Scripture Texts: Joshua 3:7-17**

<sup>7</sup> And the Lord said to Joshua, “Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses. <sup>8</sup> Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: ‘When you reach the edge of the Jordan’s waters, go and stand in the river.’”

<sup>9</sup> Joshua said to the Israelites, “Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God. <sup>10</sup> This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites. <sup>11</sup> See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you. <sup>12</sup> Now then, choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. <sup>13</sup> And as soon as the priests who carry the ark of the Lord—the Lord of all the earth—set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap.”

<sup>14</sup> So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them. <sup>15</sup> Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water’s edge, <sup>16</sup> the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan, while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah (that is, the Dead Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. <sup>17</sup> The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord stopped in the middle of the Jordan and stood on dry ground, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.

**Matthew 23:1-12**

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: <sup>2</sup>“The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. <sup>3</sup> So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. <sup>4</sup> They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.

<sup>5</sup>“Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; <sup>6</sup> they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; <sup>7</sup> they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called ‘Rabbi’ by others.

<sup>8</sup>“But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. <sup>9</sup> And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. <sup>10</sup> Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah. <sup>11</sup> The greatest among you will be your servant. <sup>12</sup> For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

**Meditation**

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

As parents, my husband and I tried our best to teach our sons good manners and appropriate behaviour.

Always say please and thank you.

Don’t interrupt when others are talking.

Wash your hands.

Hold the door for someone.

Say excuse me when you cough or sneeze.

But there is one particular lesson we taught our boys that comes back at us all the time. Table manners are important to us, and we expect the boys to act respectfully when we sit down to a meal, or even when snacking.

If you spill, clean it up.

Don’t reach for things, ask.

Chew with your lips closed.

And the big one that bites back... DON’T TALK WITH YOUR MOUTH FULL.

The other day I was standing in the kitchen while Corey was cooking for himself. We were chatting back and forth, as per usual. I was getting a little peckish so I grabbed a granola bar and took a bite. Corey said something and I responded, while chewing. Without missing a beat my eldest son looked at me and said, “Mom, don’t talk with your mouth full!” And what did I say in reply? “I taught you that. At this point in your life I shouldn’t have to model it for you!” To which Corey shot back, “Well, that’s pretty hypocritical!” Sheesh. He was absolutely right. I should practice what I preach. Saying I was exhausted and didn’t think about what I was doing

would just have been an excuse, not a reason to fly completely in the face of the teaching I've drilled into my kids!

Hypocrisy is something none of us likes. It can be seemingly harmless, like my talking with my mouth full, or it can be deeply destructive. It is certainly counter-productive. Had Corey replied to me with a mouth full of food, I would have had no ground on which to stand in telling him to remember his manners. The problem with what happened there was not the actual act of talking, but the fact that I completely ignored the principle I had taught him. Why should he do what I said if I don't do it myself?

I read a sermon this week in which the preacher said this about the kind of situation I was in with my now adult son: "From a parents' perspective of course, the situation is a nightmare, and the best a parent can usually come up with is to remind the child: Do as I *say*, and not as I *do*! After all, parents know better, and in their wisdom, may have some good reasons, though mysterious and unknown to children, for their behavior. In reality, though, parents hopefully more often choose to lead by example. The best way to teach someone and convince someone of what is right is by living these behaviors ourselves. In the church, we call this 'practicing what we preach' and we call failure to practice what we teach hypocrisy."<sup>1</sup>

In today's story from Joshua, we see Joshua practicing what he preaches. He preaches obedience, and in following the Lord's instructions to the letter, the people cross over the river in safety. The priests do what they are instructed to do, thus retaining their integrity, and Joshua continues in his role as an example for the people, and as the great leader he has been called to be. He is in place to lead the people, and in his example of obedience, he is a more effective leader, given that is the behaviour he teaches the people, repeatedly.

Israel wasn't always obedient, as we know. The priests didn't always retain their integrity, and Joshua was indeed human, failing to be obedient from time to time, even though that's what he taught. The same applied to his teacher and mentor, Moses. Forty years in the wilderness came about because of a lack of trust in God's protection and provision, and a failure to follow Yahweh's instructions.

We aren't always obedient, as we know. Church leaders don't always retain their integrity, and preachers don't always practice what they teach. We don't always trust in God's protection and provision, and we sometimes fail to follow God's instructions.

Enter Jesus.

Jesus often talked about hypocrisy, especially when he addressed or talked about the Pharisees, the religious leaders in the community. They needed to learn to practice what they preached. They put on a show and yet taught the people to be humble before God. They made a point of wearing oversized symbols of their piety, but strutted around looking for accolades and titles that implied power. They spent their time coming up with laws to make people follow the law of Moses, rather than focusing their time and energy on the purpose of the law of Moses in

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<sup>1</sup> Desperatepreacher.com. "Do as I Say and Not as I Do!" by the Rev. Elizabeth Ann Quick. Resources for November 1, 2020, Matthew 23:1-12.

the first place – obedience to God and how to live as God’s people. And Jesus didn’t hesitate to point it out, which didn’t win him any points with the Pharisees.

Now, to be fair, the Pharisees did seek to follow the law, and spent their lives studying, understanding and interpreting it for the people. But they went too far. They missed the point of the message in their quest for strict obedience to the law. Jesus tells the people to be careful in listening to these religious teachers. *So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.* “He accuses them of making a show of their faith. He says that they ‘make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long.’ Phylacteries were boxes that were tied to the arm and forehead that contained words of scripture in them, and fringes were part of a garment worn by Jewish men. The long fringes and phylacteries would be worn not by common people, but by the Pharisees, as a show of their devotion. Jesus insisted that it was actually a show of pride in their own piety. And Jesus accuses the Pharisees of being obsessed with titles and positions and places of honour.”<sup>2</sup> That obsession is hardly the marking of good leadership.

Good leadership doesn’t draw attention to itself, but these leaders flaunted their authority. Good leaders dig in to work alongside those they lead, and don’t ask someone to do something they wouldn’t be willing to do themselves. Effective leaders have vision and ideas, and work to implement them, rather than expecting someone else to do the work for them.

As I prepared for my Thursday evening Reading & Prayer service this week, I came across a prayer from the worship resource Sounds of the Eternal: A Celtic Psalter.<sup>3</sup> In the Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession for Thursday evening, the prayer begins with the experience of having witnessed inspiration of spirit in various ways. One of the ways stated is “in the prophetic vision of a leader.” Prophetic means to accurately predict what will happen in the future. In the Bible a prophet is one who speaks for God – like Moses. Jesus was called a prophet in his earthly life, but he not only spoke for God; he spoke as God. And yes, he prompted the inspiration of spirit. He still does. As he spoke, people were amazed. That included those he called hypocrites, although their amazement did not lead them to believe, but to plot against him. They planned a way to defeat him, under the law. For those who taught the people to obey the law of Moses it seems an odd way to practice what they preached. However, in the greater story, the great plan which is God’s, their hypocrisy came back to bite. For even in death Jesus’ impact was greater than theirs, and in his resurrection he overcame it all.

Jesus told his followers to do what the Pharisees instructed, but not to do what they modelled. The religious teachers of the law were so caught up in building themselves up with the law that they missed the point. The Law of Moses, not the more than 600 laws the Pharisees came up with, is about God and our relationship with God. Jesus came to be the ultimate fulfilment of the law, and his purpose is all about people. The Scripture verses carried in the phylacteries was “Love the Lord you God with all your heart and all your soul and all your

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Newell, Philip J. *Sounds of the Eternal: A Celtic Psalter (Morning and Night Prayer)*. Novalis, Toronto ON, 2002.

strength.” How did Jesus teach us how to best express obedience to that Scripture? By loving one another. The Pharisees had lost that message.

The sermon to which I referred earlier made a point that prompted some serious self-reflection on my part. “Jesus wanted the Pharisees to close the gap between their words and their actions. And it is not only the religious leaders that need this reminder. We must remember that Jesus had the most criticism for those who were inside the religious community - people like you and me who would consider ourselves generally obedient to the commandments. I think that we, like the Pharisees, make our own mental lists of commandments that are important to follow and interpretations of what God's commandments mean for us... I think that each of us has an idea of what we consider the essentials - the core beliefs you must have to be a Christian, or the core practices you must follow, or, perhaps more likely, the core list of things you *can't* do or believe and still count yourself as a Christian. What's on our lists? Perhaps it goes without saying to have things like murder on our list. Maybe we can put the ten commandments in general on our list, as long as we don't get too specific or worried about honoring the Sabbath, or coveting the things that others have... And we can probably make a case for everything on our list, and find a verse in the Bible that tells us what we are and aren't supposed to do... Be careful, Jesus says. Are we tying up heavy burdens on others? Are we, with our requirements for faithful living, making it impossible for others to live up to our standards? Are we proud of ourselves, and proud of our community of faith, and convinced that we live pretty good lives, not doing anything too bad, and in our confidence, do we make others feel overwhelmed with what it would take to become a disciple? In all their obedience, and all their efforts, even with the scriptures literally tied to them, the Pharisees still didn't practice what they preached.”<sup>4</sup>

We often hear people criticize the church as being hypocritical, and they will point to all kinds of ways in which they feel they can justify that comment. It's because we are not perfect. Every human being can be accused of hypocrisy from time to time – no matter how significant or insignificant the behaviour. We must work really hard to maintain our faithful integrity. The New Testament tells us to strive for Christ-like perfection, even though we know we simply cannot be his equal. We falter. We mess up. Striving for perfection is a heavy burden to carry, but the forgiveness we receive when we fail in that quest gives us courage to keep trying. And the best way to try? Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength, and express that love in loving others. It sounds simple; it can be pretty difficult. In all things, love God; love Jesus; love people; love humbly. That is the umbrella that covers all. Thankfully, we have One we can look to for the perfect example, the perfect teaching, the perfect law of God's love. We look to Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith. And we give thanks to God that his perfection covers our imperfections with grace. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> From the sermon “Do as I Say and Not as I Do.”