

REFLECTION

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"Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them" - Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

I keep hearing myself calling other people hypocrites. In the past month, I've called many members of Congress hypocrites for preaching inclusive, humanitarian values yet enacting legislation that is too often exclusionary and harmful. In my personal life I've deemed hypocritical friends who complain about the church, but don't want to engage with the church to help change it. My list goes on and on, and maybe yours does too.

Matthew's Gospel text is directed straight at me. The above verses, and those that precede and succeed these passages, really deal with how to follow Jesus. Jesus is instructing his disciples to be very careful about how it is that they give alms and fast. He's clear that when you give you should do so not to make your own name greater, and likewise that when you fast you should do so without making a big public show of it. Jesus explains that the reason why we give and fast isn't to make ourselves higher in the ranking of 'best followers of Christ', but rather that we give and fast to better serve God.

Lent is a season in which many of us choose to fast, or deny ourselves something, so that we can better focus on our relationship with God (or work on some other spiritual practice). This Lent one of the things that I'm giving up is my attitude that makes me feel superior to others. I hope that every time I reach to call someone else a hypocrite I stop and reflect on my own actions that lead to injustice. Just like the prophet Isaiah says, each of us can choose to loose the bonds of injustice - and this Lent I want to start with me.

PRAYER

Infinite, intimate word-made-flesh, in this season of focus I choose to be critical of my actions before those of others. I choose to see how I don't feed the hungry, before criticizing others. I choose to see how I ignore the homeless, before blaming those in power. I choose to see that I hurt with my words, before chastising others' words.

Ultimate mystery of Incarnation, in this season of focus grant that I may remember to base my action on the way Jesus lived. May I draw inspiration from his life to touch lives around me. In this season of focus, let me work for peace and justice and draw hope from the deep wells of your boundless love.

In this season of focus let my eyes be drawn inwards and let my hands and feet embrace the world that you so love. Amen.

Focus: SOCIAL JUSTICE

The Verses immediately succeeding Matthew's Gospel passage (6:19-21) are instructive in another way, which nods to faith-based service. In the verses, Jesus asks his disciples to think about what it is they prioritize. Are they prioritizing material things that will rust and fade or are they prioritizing treasures in heaven?

I think that Jesus wants us to remember that things often make us play second fiddle with people and God. The values of simplicity and social justice help me rearrange my focus to relationships and the Divine, which bring me so much more joy.

WHO INSPIRES YOU TO SERVE?

For the past six years I've been inspired to serve by Soren Kierkegaard, a 19th century philosopher who dually wrestled with how to be in the world and in your faith. I've long wrestled with the tension between jumping into service without all my ducks lined up and inevitably not doing something. Kierkegaard challenges me to accept that a certain amount of anxiety is healthy in learning to live well in the world.