

## Sermon 2023 11 05 Text

The name of God, Creator, Redeemer, and Companion on the Journey. Amen.

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“They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. <sup>6</sup> They love to have the place of honour at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces...”

Matthew 23.5–7

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How do we appear to others as the people of God?

Do we do all our deeds to be seen by others? Do we love to have the place of honour at banquets and our own seats in the Church? Do we wish to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces?

Of course we do! We would not be human if we did not.

If we do something, we expect someone to say thank you, to be grateful for our work or generosity.

And we wish to have the respect of others; to know that other people think well of us.

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We want to walk into a room and have other people be glad because we are there. We want people to rush up and speak to us, rather than being lonely at the outer edges of a group.

We want people to happy in our company and glad that we with them.

And we primp ourselves. We ensure that we are dressed presentable, that a nice, or at least neutral, aroma exudes from our body. We make sure our hair is combed. And we speak politely and gently.

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John emerged from the desert wearing camel hair clothes and having eaten honey and wild locusts. And all that time alone did not make his respectful of others or, I suspect, gentle or polite at the dinner table.

And I suspect that Jesus and his band of followers did not place personal hygiene high on their agenda.

There are no great gospel stories of Jesus and the disciples stopping beside the sea of Galilee to bath and wash their clothes.

Perhaps in some long-lost Gospel there is the story of a Syrophoenician woman who encountered Jesus and said “Master, you have developed a bad smell. See the water is close at hand and I have many bars of soap.”

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As proclaimers of hope, truth and love we are conduits. The word of God continues to come into the world through us and flows out to be heard and lived.

But we have the capacity to block that word, that saving love.

Even as people of faith, we come to believe that our mechanism for proclaiming it is the only way and at times we will be angry, hurt, manipulative and incredibly vocal that our way is **the** way, the true way, God's way.

The Gospel today is a reflection that our way is not the only way – the sole glorious way – to hear the saving words of the Gospel.

I think Jesus is saying, “Celebrate your own salvation, but not to the extent that it prevents others from hearing the Good News.”

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We must walk with humility – my salvation makes me no better than you. The apparent beauty of the church where I worship makes me no better. The apparent generosity of some in time and money in the midst of many does not mean that all do not give as much as they can.

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And despite our outward appearance, this church has great illness.

Too many are tight fisted with the currency of life that God has entrusted to us. We give enough to calm our conscience, but

not enough to sustain the long-term viability of this place of proclamation.

Too many are happy to come for themselves but are afraid of bringing others into this place of good news and love. We are a loved part of the kingdom of God, and we are looking good. But there is the possibility if we invited someone to come with us into this place of eternal life they may think less of us.

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Too often, this is a place where we are too concerned about our appearance.

We give, and we like to create an aura that we give generously. But do we give to the point where we must forgo other things? Is our giving about sacrifice or about appearance?

And we like to create an aura that we invite. People are so tied up with sport and other things these days that they will not come to church. My children, or my grandchildren or my neighbours just refuse to come. Now do they really refuse to come or are these answers to make us look good?

Do we actually ask, or do we offer words of appearance? I find it incredibly hard to believe that everyone in this church invites a friend or a family member, once a week, or one a month or even once a year to come to this place of good news and eternal light.

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If all we ever offer is appearance, we stand on the street corners to be seen by others. God is not relevant. Eternal truth, eternal life is not relevant.

Or it is relevant for us to share in eternal life, but we are too concerned about looking good to assist others to share in that eternal life.

How did you come into faith? Was it because someone brought you and taught you how important it was. Did someone else invite you to come, and you said, "Yes".

Not one of us is here unless someone else brought or invited us. None of us have eternal life unless someone else brought or invited us. None of us know true and transforming love unless someone else brought or invited us. Not one of us is in Christ unless someone else brought or invited us.

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Go then and do the same.

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"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ... pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into (the) harvest."  
Matthew 9:37–38

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