

Second Tuesday of Lent ~ 3/6

"They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues." (Mt. 23: 4-6)

This is one of those 'Trouble' with a capital 'T' readings, isn't it? What was Jesus thinking of when He took the established leaders of the people to task? This kind of verbal volley isn't going to end in hugs and back slaps. The Jerusalem insiders realized that this outsider from Nazareth was indeed dangerous. If the people began to really think for themselves and question the religious leaders' authority they would be in deep trouble. It was obvious that this upstart would need to be disgraced and, if at all possible, assassinated.

Not just anyone could do what Jesus did when He confronted the religious leaders. The person who would speak in condemnation of this group of people had to have certain qualifications. First of all, He would have to be a person who was honest about His motivations; they could not be self-serving. He would have to be courageous enough to confront this powerful group. He would need a clear understanding of how power can corrupt people. He would have to be a credible representative of an alternative style of leadership. And finally, he would have to be a prayerful person. This would be someone who understood that only through prayer do we come to understand the will of God. Jesus was indeed the perfect person for the job. He was the unblemished Lamb whose motives were pure and whose cause was just.

If this scripture passage was simply about what Jesus did two thousand years ago, then it would be simply a history lesson or a lesson in psychological interactions. But we believe scripture is so much more. Scripture is the living word of God that continues to work in the world today. The Spirit of Jesus lives on in His followers. We may not be the perfect stand-ins for Jesus. We may look at these qualifications and say to ourselves that we may not be able to live up to them as Jesus did. But perfection is not what Jesus asks of us. Jesus does ask us to take risks, to stand for something, to be informed and to know where our motives are coming from. If these qualifications are met, then God's Spirit will take care of the rest.

Questions for Reflection

- 1. What are my qualifications for leadership? How do I prepare myself to lead?*
- 2. When have I felt in my heart that I need to speak up? Did I risk doing it?*