

Where Your Heart Is

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

BEWARE!!!! Jesus sounds a warning – not just because there were hypocrites walking around in His day – but He sounds the warning, and has these words of our text written (and preserved) to this very day – because you are a hypocrite.

Wow! That's quite the start to Lent, isn't it? No sugar-coating there – just an in your face accusation and condemnation. But it's true.

A hypocrite literally means to “pretend” or “play a part.” A hypocrite was an actor who wore a mask to portray a character. It's where the phrase “two-faced” comes from. He's a liar, a pretender, a poser. Do you wear a mask?

If you say you are not a hypocrite, then you deceive yourself, and the truth is not in you. I know you are a hypocrite – because I am a hypocrite – and it is part of the nature of all mankind.

If it were not true, Jesus would not need to warn us – but He does – because He loves us, and wants our hearts to treasure His heavenly gifts.

Beware! Do not practice your righteous deeds before other people “in order to be seen by them.” When you give to the needy, don't make a grand show of it so that you “may be praised by others.” And when you pray, don't pray in such a way so that you are SEEN by others, and they are impressed with YOU. When you are fasting, don't do it in such a way that it is obvious to others and they applaud your efforts.

All of which is to say – Jesus warns you not to “lay up treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.” Jesus wants SO MUCH MORE for you than just the praise and adoration of men – He wants you to have His heavenly treasures.

But we like the adoration of others. That's the problem. That's why Jesus speaks these words of warning into our ears.

Assuming you are like me – then you know what its like when you try to do righteous things, to do good works – to give to the needy, to pray, to fast (and many other God-pleasing things) --- but a sinful pride creeps in.

I'm not talking about the satisfaction that comes from living the good life God wants for you – but the pride that says, “You know what, I really am a pretty good guy” – and then the comparison job that often goes along with it – “I really am better than most.”

Our Old Adam is a hypocrite – pretending to do something for one reason, but secretly, hiddenly, doing it for another reason. Even our attempts to be righteous, end up tainted with selfishness. We DO treasure earthly things.

Like Earl, our Old Adam needs to die. The Old Adam in us needs by daily contrition and repentance to be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires – as the Small Catechism teaches us.

That doesn't mean that “once a day” we take the time to confess our sins and ask Jesus for forgiveness (as if we are checking a box). Daily means continually. Whenever our sinful, selfish pride raises its ugly head – Jesus' “beware” should lead us to realize that we are doing this for SELF and not for our NEIGHBOR.

It is God's way of repenting His baptized children. Stopping them dead in their tracks and reminding them – this isn't about you (your reward) – it's about that person. And it is God showing you that He is at work through you to care for their needs – feeding them, hearing their prayers, protecting them, and so on.

While Lent is a special season devoted to repentance, fasting, and the denial of self – it is truly a daily, continual, and lifelong discipline for the baptized child of God. It's the life God desires for us – one that denies the sinful self, and looks to Him for all good things. A life where the heart stores up heavenly treasures, not earthly ones.

This baptismal life leads us to the Lord's Supper where the heavenly treasures nourish our earthly lives and bears fruit for the neighbor. In coming to the Lord's Table, the Small Catechism asks the question: “Who receives this sacrament worthily?”

And answers, “Fasting and bodily preparation are certainly fine outward training. But that person is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words: “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.””

And so it is in our daily lives – that fasting and bodily preparation – saying NO to ourselves, our natural desires – purposely doing something that takes the focus on my SELF so that I can serve my NEIGHBOR – can be a good thing.

Because we are naturally curved in on ourselves (which is to say, “selfish”) – God, in Christ, has to turn us around. He repents us so that we are curved outwardly – in FAITH towards God, and then to see how we can LOVE our fellow man.

It is Christ’s forgiveness that bears this fruit of faith and love. He sets you free from your sin, and from your love of self. This is why Jesus comes to you today – to warn you, to drown your sin and evil desires, to resurrect the new man who lives before God in righteousness and purity forever.

That’s who you are “in Christ Jesus.” A new man who has all the treasures of heaven, and therefore, is free to live for others. A new man with a new heart – to love your spouse, discipline your children, speak well of your boss, and so forth – not in order to receive the adoration and praise of men – but simply for their benefit, and for the glory of God. Amen.

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