

Pentecost 25 11/11/18
Mark 12:38-44 27B

BEWARE OF THE SCRIBES, WHO LIKE TO WALK AROUND IN LONG ROBES AND LIKE GREETINGS IN THE MARKETPLACES AND HAVE THE BEST SEATS IN THE SYNAGOGUES AND THE PLACES OF HONOR AT FEASTS, WHO DEVOUR WIDOWS' HOUSES AND FOR A PRETENSE MAKE LONG PRAYERS. THEY WILL RECEIVE THE GREATER CONDEMNATION.

The scribes of Jesus' day were very learned men. It was their job to study of the Law of Moses, transcribe that Law, comment on the Law, and interpret the Law. Like, for example, if you had a question of whether you could use your Keurig to make a cup of coffee on the Sabbath Day, you would ask a scribe what the Law said about it. Or, if you saw your neighbor eating a Canadian Bacon pizza, you would drag them before the scribes, so the scribes could condemn them and set them straight because the OT Law said you can't eat bacon. Oftentimes, however, they would go beyond the Law in their interpretation and in their commentary on the Law to trust in their own opinions and ideas, and that led to many conflicts with Jesus.

They had a conflict over doing work on the Sabbath Day. One Sabbath Day, Jesus entered a synagogue and met a man with a withered hand. Jesus healed that man, but the scribes condemned Him because they said He should not have done that because that was working on the Sabbath. Jesus set the straight by telling them it was ok to do good on the Sabbath.

They also didn't like it very much when Jesus did what Jesus does, like when He healed a blind and mute man, who was also demon-possessed. The scribes didn't like that, so they spread nasty rumors about Jesus. They said it was by the prince of demons, Beelzebub, that He casts out demons.

But the scribes really got bent out of shape when Jesus and the disciples sat down for a meal. They did not wash their hands according to the traditions of the elders. They confronted Jesus about this and Jesus told them they were all wrong for setting aside the Commandments of God so that you can follow the traditions, the opinions, of men.

There were many such confrontations between Jesus and the scribes. The scribes were sick and tired of Jesus so they got together with the chief priests and the elders and came up with a way to destroy Jesus.

When you look at these scribes you start to realize they were the kind of guys who just thought they were a whole lot better than you, a lot smarter than you; the kind of guys who would relish a fight with you; the kind of guys who will make up nasty rumors, just to make themselves look better; they are the kind of people who will add their opinions to the Word of God, just so they can be right; they are also the ones that if they don't like you, they will seek to destroy you.

And that should be of special interest to you as a disciple of Jesus. "Beware of the scribes," Jesus warns you, "who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

What's the big deal about robes, greetings, the best seats, devouring widows' houses, and long prayers? The robes the scribes wore were of the finest white linen, with outlandish trim. No, there is nothing wrong with wearing nice clothes. But, the attitude of the scribes was along the line that because they wore \$ 75 jeans, and your jeans cost \$ 25, they were better than you. This wouldn't be a greeting like seeing someone at the grocery

store and saying, “Hi, how are you?” No, this is the greeting that would insist that you called them, “Master,” and bow and kiss their ring, so that you knew they were more important than you. They would take the best seats to be noticed. They would actually take money from people – often, people like widows, who couldn’t afford it – to say prayers for someone. And “long” prayers, yes, their vanity and self-importance showed even here. Remember the parable Jesus told about the pharisee who stood to be the center of attention in the synagogue and prayed, “God, I thank you I am not like other men.” Yep, that’s how the scribes prayed. All this was done so that they would be noticed by everyone. It was done to draw attention to themselves, so that everyone would know how important they were.

Now do you see why you need to beware of the scribes? You need to beware because everyone likes to be noticed, to be the center of attention, to be popular. That is because the sin of pride runs deep in every one of us. Alice Roosevelt, the daughter of Teddy Roosevelt – the Teddy we are familiar with in our neck of the woods – once said of her father, [He] always wanted to be the corpse at every funeral, the bride at every wedding, and the baby at every christening.” That’s the sin of pride that runs in you and in me.

When Jesus says, “Beware of the scribes,” he is warning us against that sin of pride, that sin within us that fears what people think of us more than what God thinks of us; that part of us that wants to be praised by men, more than to be a blessing to our Father in heaven.

What is so sad is that in our desire to be popular with sinners and a sinful world, we even set aside our faith in Jesus. Someone tells an off-color joke, and you laugh hysterically, just like everyone else. You destroy

your neighbor with gossip and innuendo, especially to make yourself look all the better. You lie to your parents, to be with your friends, to do with your friends what your parents forbid you from doing.

And those words of Jesus are also a warning to us not to place our opinions, ideas, thoughts, above the Word of God. You've heard these man-made rules: don't drink booze, don't dance, don't play cards, don't eat meat on Fridays.

"Beware of the scribes," Jesus says, because this is not the life Jesus has called you to. Psalm 115:1 says, "Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness." You are called to live a life that is lived so that your light may shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory NOT to you, but to your Father in heaven (cf. Mt 5:16). You have been called to a life of service to your neighbor, not glory for itself. That is the life Jesus has called you to. That is the life the scribes were to live, but that was not the life they lived. They wanted the praise and glory and honor of men, and – guess what – they got what they wanted. They received their reward. On the Last Day, they will be judged more harshly for their sin of pride and so, too, will all who follow in their path. "Beware of the scribes!"

So, you might wonder: How can I escape their error? How can I escape falling into the greater condemnation? The GOOD NEWS of the Gospel is that the same Jesus who warns you to beware of the scribes is the same Jesus who saves you from the sin of pride.

Jesus went to Jerusalem and Golgotha, and there He received no praises of men. Rather, He was subject to mockery and ridicule. He had no long robe of fine linen to wear; He was stripped naked. He had a seat, not the best seat in the synagogue, nor the seat of honor, but a seat of the

wood of the cross. There, He did not utter a long prayer, but only a short prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do (Lk 23:34)." He endured the greater condemnation, as He suffered and died on Calvary's cross for you. The 3rd day, He rose again to bring you the forgiveness He won upon the cross, so that you may not be condemned, but a beloved child of God.

That He did in your baptism, when he forgave you all your sins, so the Father could say of you, "This is my beloved, son, daughter." You don't need the praise of men, you have the approval of God.

Christ has set you free from sin, pride, ego, self-centeredness, so you can shovel your neighbor's snow, cut their grass, change their diaper, wash dishes, weep with them when they weep, and rejoice with them when they rejoice, because when you do that, God is serving your neighbor through you, and you glorify God.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.