

25th S. after Pentecost 11/10/24
Mark 12:38-44 27B

SERMON TEXT: APPOINTED GOSPEL READING FOR TODAY, FROM THE 12TH CHAPTER OF MARK'S GOSPEL

Without a doubt, the greatest movie ever made is the 1969 western, "True Grit." The epic western is the story of young Mattie Ross traveling to Fort Smith, Arkansas, to hire U.S. Marshall Rooster Cogburn to avenge the murder and robbery of her father. U.S. Marshal Reuben "Rooster" J. Cogburn is played by none other than the greatest actor of all time, John Wayne.

I'm guessing you are asking yourself that most Lutheran of questions right now: WHAT DOES THIS MEAN? What could that possibly have to do with our worship today? Well, John Wayne and True Grit help us understand our Gospel lesson today. We have to remember "True Grit" is just a movie and John Wayne is just an actor playing a part. I hold this before you this morning because "hypocrite" is the Greek word for ... actor. I think its fair to say we hear that word "hypocrite," but we don't always fully grasp what it means. In its most simple sense, a hypocrite is pretending to be something they are not; like an actor playing a part. Think "True Grit" and of John Wayne. The movie is made in 1969. The man John Wayne never goes back to Arkansas in the year 1880 to become a real U.S. Marshal. He's just an actor playing a role. He's just pretending to be something he's not – like the Scribes in our lesson this morning.

In our reading this morning, Jesus is contrasting two different types of people – religious hypocrites, in the Scribes, and those of the true piety of faith, as exemplified in this poor widow in the temple.

You know about the scribes, right? They were big shots. They were experts in the Law; not the civil law, but in the Law of Moses. If you had the question if you could make a cup of coffee with your Keurig on the Sabbath or was that doing labor on the Sabbath, you asked a Scribe. If you wanted to eat a Canadian Bacon pizza or go to Shrimp feast at Red Lobster, you asked a Scribe if that was ok. The sad part was that they went well beyond what Moses taught in the Law to teach and bind consciences with their own opinions.

You remember that these guys weren't even shy about getting in Jesus' face. They condemned the Savior for healing a man with a withered hand because it was on the Sabbath. When Jesus healed a blind and mute man, who also happened to be demon-possessed, they said it was by the prince of demons, Beelzebub, that he had the power to cast out demons. And, they also got all bent out of shape when the Lord's disciples didn't wash their hands before eating according to their rules.

Look at Jesus' warning against religious hypocrites,

“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 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 wear \$ 200 Nike tennis shoes and you don't, they were just better than you. When you greeted them in the grocery store, it wasn't with a, “Hi, how are you?” No, they 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 – long-winded prayers -- for someone. 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? The Scribes thought they were just a lot better than you, a lot smarter than you. They just looked down their nose at you. They thought they were the holy, righteous ones before God. To be certain, they were not holy and righteous before God, because they based their standing with God on their works, not their faith. They looked good on the outside, in the eyes of sinful people, but remember what Jesus said, *“within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness (Mt 23:27).”* They were not true saints of God, because *without faith it is impossible to please [God] (He 11:6).*

Are you beginning to understand they Jesus warns you, “Beware of the scribes?” We must, My Friends, be on guard because it is so easy to follow in their footsteps. Our Lord warns us that we are in the world, but we are not of the world. But, how often is it we pretend to be something we are not – we pretend to be of the world because we are far more concerned about being popular with the world, than popular with God. You lie to your parents, so you can go along and get along with your friends, even when that means doing what your parents forbid you from doing. Someone tells an off-color joke, and you laugh hysterically, just like around you. You are ready and eager to destroy your neighbor with gossip and innuendo, especially to make yourself look all the better. You look with the green-eyed monster of jealousy at your neighbor's stuff and lie to yourself,

“If only I had that..., I would be happy.” How often it is that we allow the world to squeeze us into its mold.

Contrast the hypocrisy of the Scribes with the pious faith of this *“poor widow who came and put in two small copper coins, which made a penny”*. The important point here is not that this woman gave everything but that she trusted God to supply all her needs. In fact, Jesus’ words in the original Greek read, “...from her poverty, as much as she had, she threw **in her whole life**.” Jesus looked beyond the coins and saw a woman who loved God with all her heart, soul, mind, and strength. She may have been poor on the outside, but her heart was truly rich on the inside.

Oh, My Friends, how rich we are before God. We are rich because the Holy One of God offered His whole life on the cross. Here is One who was never a hypocrite – who never did anything that deserved condemnation. And yet, here is the One who endured the greatest condemnation and made payment for the sins of the world. When Jesus suffered and died on the cross, He offered up His whole life as the perfect sacrifice to God – which means that we are forgiven all our sins, My Friends.

Which means, My Friends, that we do not need to pretend to be something that we are not. At your Baptism, God forgave you all your sin and declared of you, “This is my beloved, son, daughter.” You don’t need the praise of men, you have the approval of God. You are God’s own child.

In that blessed washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, God the Holy Spirit works faith in you, so that you can follow in the footsteps of this pious widow, to love God with all your heart, with all your soul, and all your mind. And you can give your whole self in service to your neighbor, shoveling your neighbor’s snow, cutting their grass, changing

their diaper, weeping with them when they weep, and rejoicing with them when they rejoice, because when you do that, God is serving your neighbor through you, and you glorify God.

My favorite hymn has the line, “On earth their work was not thought wise {*LW* 192:2).” This world, in all of its perversity, will never think you wise for denying yourself and following Jesus. But you are a stranger here, heaven is your home.

As we approach the end of the Church Year, our worship focuses on the day when Jesus will come again in all of His glory. Oh, how we pray, “Thy kingdom come,” longing for that day when hear, “*Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your master (Mt 25:23).*”