

SERMON FOR NOVEMBER 2, 2014

All Saints Day—All Souls Day

The First Chinese Church of Christ in Hawai'i

United Church of Christ

Scripture: Matthew 23:1-12

Message: **"Church Leaders Serve the People
Of TFCCCH!"**

Kekapa P.K. Lee



GATHERING IN THE WORD OF GOD

Leaders at our Church are critical factors for all of us:

- Leadership matters and are gifts to all!
- Leadership is service to God and to all of us!
- Leadership helps to cultivate a loving community!
- All of us at TFCCCH are responsible for insuring that our leaders and pastors exercise our gifts effectively, appropriately, authentically, and congruently—meaning consistently and harmoniously and with aloha!

Leadership is exercised in service—matching our words and deeds—trusting God in creating community here at TFCCCH!

Matthew 23 begins the final major section of the Gospel of Matthew (23:1-25:46) which has the overarching theme of the present and coming judgment of God! Matthew 23 is addressed to Jesus' followers—both disciples and potential disciples—rather than Jesus' opponents. The scribes and Pharisees represent the Jewish leadership in the time of Matthew's community. This indicates the growing tension between synagogue and church in the latter part of the 1st century!

HEARING THE WORD OF GOD

Matthew 23:1-12 The VOICE Bible

23 ¹Jesus spoke to His disciples and to the crowds that had gathered around.

Jesus with the Pharisees listening uses them as an example of the pious but truly unrighteous. He calls the people to mind the Pharisees' words, not their examples, because they talk about righteousness and faithfulness, but they are a faithless and unrighteous crew.

Jesus: ² The Pharisees and the scribes occupy the seat of Moses. ³ So you should do the things they tell you to do—but don't do the things they do. ⁴ They heap heavy burdens upon their neighbors' backs, and they prove unwilling to do anything to help shoulder the load. ⁵ They are interested, above all, in presentation: they wrap their heads and arms in the accoutrements of prayer, they cloak themselves with flowing tasseled prayer garments, ⁶ they covet the seats of honor at fine banquets and in the synagogue, ⁷ and they love it when people recognize them in the marketplace, call them "Teacher," and beam at them.

⁸ But you: do not let anyone call you "Rabbi," *that is, "Teacher."* For you are all brothers, and you have only one teacher, the Anointed One. ⁹ Indeed, do not call anyone on earth "Father," for you have only one father, and He is in heaven. ¹⁰ Neither let anyone call you "leader," for you have one leader—the Anointed One. ¹¹ If you are recognized at all, let it be for your service. *Delight in the one who calls you servant.* ¹² For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

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Us pastors need to be wary of the titles people give us—“Pastor”, “Reverend”, “Kahu” (*Hawaiian for pastor and shepherd*). In Matthew 23 Jesus has had as much as he can take from the religious leaders who had been engaging in a ‘tag-team’ effort to trip him up and cause Jesus to fail.

So here in today’s lesson Jesus cuts loose with the single-most-harsh and negative speech Jesus gives anywhere in the New Testament!

Matthew 23 presents seven hard-hitting indictments and accusations and charges the clergy with hypocrisy and being two-faced!

**The Pharisees are all about false fronts, facades, public relations, prestige, and just generally getting ahead in society! And in detailing all this—the otherwise soft-spoken man from Nazareth does not spare the verbal lashes: Jesus calls them sons of hell, blind guides, stinking graves, vipers, and bullies!
Wow!**

Jesus even tells everyone that they must obey the words of these leaders! This probably really means that when these ministers read from God’s Word, so, the contents and teachings must be heard and heeded and followed; but that’s where the positive part ends!

“Do what they say, not what they do!” Jesus says.
“They don’t practice what they preach, and so even though they want you to take note of their lifestyle

and how they live—ignore them!” The minister doesn’t practice what he/she preaches!

Jesus had to say it—the Pharisees did not practice and live out and put into practice the Word of God in their everyday life that they read from the pulpit!

Instead the Pharisees focused their energies on just *looking* good. The Pharisees strutted and swaggered around trying to look ever-so-holy but only because it generated prestige and status. They made certain to have their flowing robes on because when they did—they got a clergy discount on fruit at the marketplace or was it CVS-Longs next door; or got upgraded to 1st class when they traveled, got seated upfront at the head table at banquets!

Our Lord Jesus is only interested in our inner-person. If it should be that people admire you for the kind of person you genuinely are—that is fine as far as it goes; but Jesus’ warning in Matthew 23 indicates to us that even so—those honors should not assume too high a profile in our own minds—Jesus knows the seductive power of such things!

But that’s why we are the Body of Christ at The First Chinese Church of Christ in Hawai’i (TFCCCH) celebrating our 135th year—we are sisters and brothers—we are family and `ohana in Christ!

DOING THE WORD OF GOD

So what is the Word of God for us this morning?

1.ONE: WE ARE ALL CALLED TO LIVE A LIFE WORTHY OF GOD!

- Did I say perfect?
- Align ourselves with God in such a way that our words reveal God's life—a transforming message to others.
- Our only "audience" is our Creator God!
- "Walk the Talk!"

2.TWO: WE ARE TO OPEN OURSELVES TO GOD'S WORD SPEAKING AND WORKING THROUGH US!

- We can be God's voice, in all humility, to one another here at TFCCCH, to our families, and to our friends, neighbors, and even strangers.
- Did I say we gotta be perfect?
- God is always involved with us and the Church in the raising up of leaders and in our Church's *corporate decision-making process*! This is what a congregational church is all about!
- What is God the Holy Spirit saying to you! Listen! Talk to your pastor! Talk to others in our Church!
- We are always seeking those who are listening to the Holy Spirit for our Church! If you are hearing the Spirit talk to you—go find Charlene Han and talk story with her!

3.THREE: God's message joins rather than separates us from others—binding us together in brokenness and healing!

- You are suffering the loss of a spouse, a family member, a parent or grandparent; a good friend—God’s promise is that Jesus will wipe every tear from our eyes one day—so in the meantime Jesus sees our struggles and knows our grief and sadness.
- God makes the impossible—possible—that’s why we are Family together!
- We are God’s presence to each other! We pray, we visit, we talk story, we pray, we laugh, we go out to eat . . . that’s what we Christians do!

SENDING IN THE WORD OF GOD

Today is All Saints Sunday in the Church around the World. This is the day we celebrate the communion of the saints—a spiritual communion between the saints in heaven who have gone on before us and we here today who are living, November 2, 2014!

We will remember those in our midst who have died the past year on November 16th at our 10:30 Remembrance Sunday Service!

So when we gather in a few minutes at Jesus’ Table for the Lord’s Supper, let us be inspired by the Holy Spirit who lives and dwells in each of us for God recognizes and knows us as saints in God’s hands!

Thanks be to God! Alleluia! Amen!

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