

Tuesday 2 March 2021

Today is Tuesday the 2 March in the second week of Lent.

The choir of Portsmouth Cathedral sing the Lent Prose: 'Hear us, O Lord, have mercy upon us, for we have sinned against Thee.' As I listen to this ancient chant, I pause to remind myself that God is present here, a God of forgiveness, gracious and loving, slow to anger, abounding in goodness. I place myself and all my cares into God's loving hands.

Today's reading is from the Gospel of Matthew.

Matthew 23:1-12

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear,^[a] 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, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have people call them rabbi. But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students.^[b] And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father—the one in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah.^[c] The greatest among you will be your servant. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.

When Jesus attacks the scribes and the Pharisees here, there are some things on his list of what they do wrong that might not trouble me too much. I can probably rest easy in the knowledge that I'm not the kind of person that goes around wearing a broad phylactery. But am I a little more uncomfortable when he mentions doing things to be seen by others, or loving it when I am greeted with respect?

Jesus also speaks about the titles we should not use – names we should not call ourselves. Does it matter to me what people call me? How they address me?

Am I sometimes annoyed when people don't seem to be showing enough respect? Or maybe when they are too deferential and reverent?

As I listen again to these words of Jesus, can I forget about the scribes and Pharisees for a moment, and just notice who it is that his words describe?

“All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.” True humility is not about putting myself down, but knowing the truth about myself, my strengths and weaknesses, knowing that I am not the centre of the world, but still a beloved child of God. Now could be a good moment to talk to God about that, perhaps asking God to help me see myself as I truly am, with nothing to be afraid of.

You have given all to me. To you, Lord, I return it. Everything is yours; do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace, that is enough for me.