

11/5/17 Mt. 23: 1-12 & Mal. 1: 14b-2:2b, 8-10

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Drawing with permission by Fr. Robert Beck

Link to [Beck](#) (paywall) other [Beck](#)

Stone, Naomi. [The Greatest of These is Love](#)

Rolheiser, Fr. Ron. [The Triumph of Appearance](#)

[Monastery Sunday Homilies](#)

ENTERING THE SCENE:

Fr. Beck in his drawing draws our eyes to Jesus' finger pointing to the ground. He wants our man in the litter to "get grounded" in what truth really is. When we 'lift up' people and give them authority, we need to check out their choices. Do what they say and what they do match up? For Jesus it always did, so the people recognized that and gave him authority in their lives. We are warned against taking outward symbols and practices as truth. Truth comes when we are given the respect that a son or daughter of God happens. So like Jesus in our drawing, we need to take off our sandals, become grounded in his teachings and be eternally grateful for the fact that we all have but one Father.

Mt. 23:1-12

1 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: 2 The **teachers** of the law and the **Pharisees** sit in **Moses' seat**. 3 So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not **practice** what they preach. 4 They **tie up heavy loads** and put them on men's **shoulders**, but they themselves are not willing to **lift a finger** to move them. 5 Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their **phylacteries** wide and the **tassels** on their garments long; 6 they



LAYING OFF OF BURDENS

love the place of **honor** at **banquets** and the most important seats in the **synagogues**; 7 they love to be greeted in the **marketplaces** and to have men call them '**Rabbi**.' 8 But you are not to be called '**Rabbi**,' for you have only one **Master** and you are all **brothers**. 9 And do not call anyone on earth '**father**,' for you have one **Father**, and he is in heaven. 10 Nor are you to be called '**teacher**,' for you have one **Teacher**, the **Christ**. 11 The greatest among you will be your **servant**. 12 For whoever **exalts** himself will be **humbled**, and whoever **humbles** himself will be **exalted**.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Jesus teaches that the greatest among us is the one who serves our real needs in love. Who is the greatest person in your life these days?

PRAYER: Lord, you remind me of a truth that resides deep in my soul. When I experience being loved, I get a glimpse of the Father's love. It might be the person who smiles, holds the door, helps me out of a chair, remembers my birthday, offers to drive me to the doctor when I am sick, listens when I am grieving or celebrating, gives me the benefit of the doubt, and much more. Help me as I try to be your servant with those you put in my life today. Amen.

WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

TEACHER/S: Teacher is the title that Jesus accepted for himself. The people saw the difference between he who always practiced what he taught, and the people who were not able to do this.

Have you ever been in the situation where you were getting mixed messages? How did you deal with this?

LAW: The law was originally seen to be God's greatest gift to humanity. It enabled the diverse peoples to form community and enhanced their lives. By the time of Jesus, the law had become a terrible burden.

What do you think caused this terrible shift? Can you think of any contemporary situation where a law that was intended to enhance life, became into something that enslaved life instead?

PHARISEES: Here the Pharisees are given authority along with the teachers, as ones who interpreted the law. However, their behavior contradicted what they taught.

What do you do when you find someone teaching something they themselves are not doing? What effect does this have on you as you listen to their teaching?



MOSES' SEAT: In the temple and the synagogues there was a seat that was used by the High Priest and teachers. This was the place that corresponds to the pulpit in today's churches.
When someone is speaking from the pulpit do you listen differently than if they were anywhere else? Why?

PRACTICE: To have a practice, is to have a response or behavior that is predictable in a given situation.
Have the people come to predict the behaviors and responses of the teachers and Pharisees? How does Jesus' help the disciples straighten out the mixed messages they are receiving from their religious leaders?

TIE UP: To tie up is to restrict or limit someone or something.

What is being tied up in this parable? Who is being tied up in this parable? Is there anything in your belief system that was meant to free you, but somehow is now 'tying you up'? What is it?

HEAVY LOADS: The original Ten Commandments have now become 613 in all. The school of Shammai sees each of the 613 as equal in importance, whereas the school of Hillel makes distinctions between the heavy (essential) and the light (less essential).
What school do you think Jesus belonged to? Are there any similar struggles in your faith life, where one good seems to be in contest with another good? How do you decide what is essential and less essential?

SHOULDERS: To have something placed on your shoulders is to give you the role of carrying it.

Who was carrying what in this parable? Who wasn't carrying what in this parable?

LIFT: To lift is to raise up. The teachers and Pharisees weigh down the person with much that is not essential in their faith life, and people go away heavily burdened and often disheartened.

How does this parable lift burdens? Can good advice that helps clarify a question lift you up? Have you ever given someone such a lift? Have you received such a lift yourself?

FINGER: The small effort to lift a finger is contrasted with the heavy loads on shoulders that require much labor.

Have you had a heavy load and there was no one willing or able to lift a finger to help you? What feelings do you remember having then? How does Jesus' teaching lift those hearing it?



PHYLACTERIES: [See description below] A pious Jew wears these reminders of God's word. The size of the bands and boxes was often used to make a statement about the wearer's piety.

What is Jesus saying about this practice here? Can you think of a modern day example of a 'phylactery'?

TASSELS: The tassels were signs of distinction worn on the prayer shawl to remind the wearer of God's laws. The length of the tassel was also used to make a statement about the piety of the person.

Can you think of a modern day example of a 'tassel'?



MARKETPLACES: The marketplace was the place where food and goods were sold, meetings held, news exchanged, laborers hired. In Jesus' day was the place where you went to be seen by everyone.

Why do you think Jesus used the marketplace as the example in this story? What place serves a similar function today?

RABBI: A Rabbi in Jesus' day was a recognized teacher of the law and the prophets, and meant "my great one". Not until the 3rd century CE did the role develop into its present form. Jesus himself was often called 'Rabbi'.

What does Jesus do to the understanding of the word, Father? Why do you think his remark might upset those hearing this explanation?

MASTER: The word master refers to someone who we recognize as being of superior rank or knowledge.

What is Jesus saying about God in this story? What is he saying about himself?

BROTHERS: Brothers are of the same family of origin.

What is Jesus saying by using the word brother here?

FATHER: A father of a family had absolute authority to make decisions for himself and his family. In the new family of Jesus there are only children, no patriarchs: "call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father - the one in heaven."

When Jesus calls God, Father, what is he saying about himself? About us, when he calls us brothers and sisters?

CHRIST: Christ in the original language means savior, the anointed one.

How is Jesus using the word, Christ, here?

SERVANT: A servant does what the master requests. Servants are not free. Unlike hired hands they owed their lives to those who owned them. It was a step above slave, but not much of a step.

What do you think the disciples made of this reversal of roles? How can this affect the way we relate to each other in this new way of understanding of God's ways?

EXALT/ED: To exalt is to rise up to lofty heights. Jesus, once again, uses words in a way that stretches the listener.

How is he stretching the disciples now? How is he stretching you with these words?

HUMBLES/ED: To humble someone or something is to lower them or it.

What do you think the disciples make of this example? What do you make of it?

PARALLEL TEXTS: Mt. 23:1 // Rom. 2:22f; Mt. 23:3 // Rom. 2:23f; Mt. 23: 4 // Lk. 11:46; Mt. 23:5 // Mt. 6:1-6; Ex. 13:9; Nu. 15:38; Dt. 6:8; Mt. 23:6 // Mk. 12:38f; Lk. 11:43; Mt. 23:7 // Lk. 20:46; Mt. 23:11 // Mt. 20:26; Mt. 23:12 // Mt. 18:4; Lk. 1:52f; 14:11; 18:14;

OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK: Mal. 1:14-2:2, 8-10; [Ps. 131:1-3](#); 1Thes. 2:7-9,13; Mt. 23:1-12;

Revised Common Lectionary: Josh. 3:7-17; [Ps. 107:1-7, 33-3](#); 1 Thes. 2:9-13; Mt. 23:1-12;

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:

Good leaders must have a certain capacity for non-polarity thinking and full-access knowing (prayer), a tolerance for ambiguity (faith), an ability to hold creative tensions (hope), and an ability to care (love) beyond their own personal advantage. Pg. 158.

Richard Rohr: The Naked Now

In general, you can lead people on the spiritual journey as far as you yourself have gone. You can't talk about it or model the path beyond that. That's why the best thing you can keep doing for people is to stay on the journey yourself. Transformed people transform people. Richard Rohr

Trees that grow tall have deep roots. Great height without great depth is dangerous. The great leaders of this world - like St. Francis, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr., - were all people who could live with public notoriety, influence, and power in a humble way because of their deep spiritual rootedness. Without deep roots we easily let others determine who we are. But as we cling to our popularity, we may lose our true sense of self. Our clinging to the opinion of others reveals how superficial we are. We have little to stand on. We have to be kept alive by adulation and praise. Those who are deeply rooted in the love of God can enjoy human praise without being attached to it. Henri Nouwen

Go to the people. Live among them. Learn from them. Love them. Start with what they know. Build on what they have. But of the best leaders, when their task is accomplished, when their work is done ... the people will remark: 'We have done it ourselves.'-often quoted by John Perkins Proverb

God looked into His heart long ago and fell so much in love with us that He created us out of sheer love. Love, you see, is the explanation of all that is good. _ Catherine of Siena, "Letters"

It is wonderful how the exercise of one's will in a matter like this will eventuate in the correct emotions. Determining to wish that person's good; deliberately trying to do something loving for him; and praying for him - all this will someday bring about the emotion of love itself. But love, as the Bible interprets it, is an affair of the will, not necessarily of the emotions. - Isobel Kuhn

"This is the nature of love: to the extent that we distance ourselves from the center of the circle and do not love God, we distance ourselves from our neighbour; but if we love God, then the nearer we draw to him in love, the more we are united with our neighbour in love." Dorotheus of Gaza, "Instructions"

"The weakness of power is that when power is confronted by the authority of truth, it is no match for the power of weakness that bears the mark of truth." Lehmann, Paul. The Transfiguration of Politics. Harper & Row, N.Y., 1974. Page 59.

Phylacteries are small boxes that hold tiny parchments with scriptural passages written on them. The passages are Ex. 13:1-10, Ex. 13:11-16, Dt. 6:4-9, Dt. 11:13-21. The one worn on the head, in front of the eyes, has four tiny scrolls, and the one worn on the left arm near the heart has one scroll but the same passages on it. This is to remind the wearer of the basic words of God at all times.

The worst enemies of religion usually lie within religion itself. A subtle rigidity takes over that blocks the flow of healing....The Pharisees should be viewed as an attitude toward religion, rather than a specific theology.....Pharisaism at its best establishes a

ministry of visitation and comforting of the sick, and at its worst deepens the burden of personal doubt and unworthiness that can accompany any illness. Galipeau, Steven A. *Transforming Body & Soul*. NY. Paulist Press. 1990. Pg. 88.

Jesus revises God-language by using the familiar *Abba* for God. He speaks of the Messiah as servant rather than king to visualize new relations between the divine and the human. Relation to God no longer becomes a model for dominant-subordinate relations between social groups, leaders, and the led. Rather, relation to God means we are to call no man "Father, Teacher of Master" (Mt. 23:1-12). Relation to God liberates us from hierarchical relations and makes us all brothers-sisters of each other. Those who would be leaders must become servants of all. Ruether, Rosemary Radford. *Sexism and God-Talk*. Boston. Beacon Press. 1983. Page 136.

Whether they like it or not, they are our brothers. They will only cease to be our brothers when they have ceased to say, "our Father." St. Augustine.

"To demand that others should provide you with textbook answers is like asking a strange woman to give birth to your baby. There are insights that can be born only of your own pain, and they are the most precious." - **Janusz Korczak**

People will recognize us as speaking with authority only when they sense that, like Jesus, we are under divine authority ourselves, that our message is not our own, that our actual lives stand behind the message, that our words are meant to reveal God and not ourselves, that we love others enough to give up protecting ourselves, that our real concern is God's kingdom and not how we impress others, that we consider the community bigger than ourselves, and that we are willing to sweat blood rather than get bitter or walk away. Rolheiser, Fr. Ron. *Ministering with authority*. The Catholic Messenger, 2/6/03. Page 10.

To Jesus it was the Pharisees who were peculiar. They could not honestly perceive themselves and others. From the point of view of modern psychology, we would say that the Pharisees had a big "shadow problem." Trying to adhere to their strict religious codes, they left a large part of their personalities in the unconscious. When we deny parts of ourselves in this way, those parts become dangerous to us. Emotions repressed for whatever reasons can bring on illness, physical and psychological. Or we relieve ourselves of our unconscious shadows by projecting them onto others. "The Pharisees projected their shadows onto those they judged, tax collectors and sinners. In so doing, they separated themselves from them. The Pharisees likewise projected their shadows onto Jesus, who challenged their hypocrisy and their resistance to self-awareness. They accused Jesus of blasphemy, of claiming to be God. Yet in the gospels, especially the more historical synoptics, Jesus makes no such claim. He teaches of God's kingdom. He judges no one. The Pharisees are the ones truly guilty of blasphemy, of playing God. Many Christians like to say that Jesus died for our sins. More accurately, he died because of the sin of the Pharisees, an element of human nature found in all of us. They lacked the inner experience to correct their own problem. Galipeau, Steven A. *Transforming Body & Soul*. NY. Paulist Press. 1990. Page 62.

Do all the good you can, with all the means you can, in all the ways you can, to all the people you can, as long as you can. (Native American Prayer)

Leadership (as opposed to tyranny) happens only where there is virtue, and reverence is the virtue on which leadership most depends. Pg. 165

Openness and honesty are defenses a good leader employs against the danger of bad judgment. Leaders are especially vulnerable to bad judgment when they allow themselves to become isolated. Pg. 176.

Woodruff, Paul. *Reverence: Renewing a Forgotten Virtue*. Oxford Univ. Press.

23.1-12: Seven woes against scribes and Pharisees (Mk 12.38-40; Lk 11.37-52). 2: Sit on Moses' seat, Jesus acknowledges the Pharisees' Torah knowledge (cf. Pesiq. Rav Kah. 1.7). 4: Heavy burdens, Jesus accuses Pharisees of imposing harsh teachings (contrast 11.28-29). Jews traditionally look upon Torah as a blessing, not a burden. 5: Phylacteries (Gk "phylaktēria," "safeguard"; Heb "tefillin," from "tefillah," "prayer"), boxes containing scriptural passages (Ex 13.1-10; 13.11-16; Deut 6.4-9; 11.13-21), which are worn on the forehead and arm during prayer (Ex 13.9,16; Deut 6.8; 11.15; b. Ber. 6a; b. Men. 34b; 35b; 37a). Fringes, see 9.20n. 7: Rabbi, Heb, lit., "my great one," meaning "teacher" or "master," a negative term in Matthew (e.g., 26.49; contrast Jn 20.16). 11: Greatest among you, (Mk 9.33-37; 10.41-45; Lk 9.46-50). See 18.4; 20.26. 12: 18.4; Lk 14.11; 18.14. 13: Woe to you, see 11.21n. Scribes and Pharisees, the pairing suggests scribes of the Pharisees (cf. m. Sot. 3.4; b. Sot. 22; contrast Mt 13.52; 23.2). Hypocrites, see 6.2n. Lock people out, for Matthew, to follow Pharisees is to be damned. Pg. 42 [The Jewish Annotated New Testament](#)

SUGGESTED READINGS:

Links to all the books mentioned in this guide are on The Ark web site: www.theark1.com