

WEEKLY DEVOTION – Tuesday, October 15, 2024
Pastor Bruce Kischnick, Grace Lutheran Church, New Albany, IN

“What’s on the Inside?”

READING: Matthew 23:25-28 – “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.”

Lately I have had some medical testing and imaging going on. Seems I have a leaky heart valve of which I knew nothing until recently. The first experience was with an echo-cardiogram. It was rather fascinating to go through the results with my cardiologist as he pointed out the atria, ventricles, and the various valves into and out of my heart. I watched my own heart beating, could see the blood rushing through it, and I could see where the blood was back-tracking through the leaky mitral valve. Next came the TEE (that is a trans-esophageal echo-cardiogram). Again in viewing the result I could watch my own heart working away, this time from a different angle.

Most of you have probably had X-rays taken at some point in your lives. Those don’t do much good for the soft tissues, but they show bones and joints clearly. Any pins, plates, or screws you’ve had surgically added also show up well. And, if someone swallows a coin or a spring or any other foreign item, the X-rays will pinpoint its current location in the body. MRI’s and CT scans show soft-tissue details that help doctors decide what might need to be corrected, removed, or dealt with. All of these procedures can show what goes on inside the body.

In Jesus’ day such procedures weren’t even dreamt of. The ancients had only a rudimentary idea of what was inside a person and how those things worked. Most of their information came from the slaughtering of animals for food and sacrifice. They could only approximate what their own insides might look like. No, mostly they could only look at the outside of a person.

Jesus makes clear that the outside of people was often misleading. He specifically targets the teachers of the law and the Pharisees because these two groups of men prided themselves on their status amongst the Jews for their righteousness, knowledge of the law, and their integrity. They were admired by many because from the outside they looked like holy men. They tithed regularly, some of them even tithed their herbs, sacrificing a tenth of even their mint and dill. They kept the appointed fasts, but even fasted on a weekly basis, often moaning “involuntarily” from their hunger pangs. They wore long tassels and phylacteries (boxes containing Scripture passages) on their foreheads and right arms to show their steadfastness to God’s word. They looked so moral – on the outside!

But Jesus knew what many could not see – some of these men were hypocrites. They made an outward show of keeping the law, but inside and secretly they were guilty of many sins. Their pride, their arrogance, and their envy were sinful in and of themselves. Their desire for adulation caused them to strut and preen and look down on those they considered “sinners”. They used the law to swindle widows, avoid obligations, and enrich themselves. Worst of all, many felt no real need for repentance. As Mac Davis famously sang, “Oh Lord, it’s hard to be humble when you’re perfect in every way!”

Jesus calls them out publicly because their self-delusion needed to be confronted. Jesus holds up the mirror of God's perfection and omniscience in hopes that these men would recognize their own sinfulness and their dire need for a savior. They resisted Jesus because they saw no need to be saved. They were pleasing God every day in every way, or so they believed. No need for his salvation. They had their own!

You and I can see their foolishness and blindness. But can we see our own? We good church-going, Bible-believing, hymn-singing, Scripture-quoting Christians – do we recognize our fallen natures? We confess it freely, but do we truly know and believe it? That's where God's word becomes a "scanner" of our insides. It shows us what we need to know about ourselves: we deserve nothing but God's judgment. It also tells us that for Jesus' sake, we are forgiven and accepted as God's children. Let us do all we are able to walk humbly in his way, aware that God sees directly into our hidden places. He sees our spiritual hearts and all their workings. Nothing is hidden from him. And still he deigns to call us his own. Thanks be to God through Jesus our Lord. Amen.

PRAYER:

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- 1) **MARY MILLER CRUISE** through the Locks is set for October 19. Interest was such that the bus filled immediately. We are also taking the van. The cost of the cruise is \$38 per person. If you are signed up, please send or bring a check made out to "Grace Lutheran Church" to the office or in an envelope in the offering plate.
- 2) The **PRESCHOOL** is holding their "School Carnival" on Saturday, October 26, from 10-2:00. Games, prizes, food, and surprises for kids from 3-99. Bring your little ones and your middle ones. They'll have a ball!