

The Rev. Jay Lawlor encouraged “Be Good News” at St. John's Episcopal Church, Speedway for 22nd Sunday After Pentecost

The Rev. Jay Lawlor began two months as visiting priest at St. John's Episcopal Church in Speedway, IN on Nov. 5, 2017.

INDIANAPOLIS, IN, US, February 27, 2018 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [The Rev. Jay Lawlor](#) preached his first [sermon](#) as visiting priest at Saint John's Episcopal Church in Speedway, Indiana on November 5, 2017. The Rev. Lawlor's message was "Be Good News" to the world.



Jesus wants his followers to focus on God and serving others to lift burdens, not add to them.”

The Rev. Jay Lawlor

Perhaps we have heard the phrase “Do as I say, and not as I do.” Perhaps, especially if a parent, we have used the phrase ourselves a time or two. It’s in keeping with “Because I said so.” Admittedly, not the best positions to find ourselves in. They are phrases of last resort when we don’t have anything

else better to say; when we find ourselves at a loss as to how to respond.

But such phrases, if we are honest, bear a burden. They bear a burden on those receiving the words by placing expectations on someone else that the speaker of the words do not hold themselves to. But it also points to burdens for the speaker – whether they realize it or not. Burdened by their own behavior which contradicts their own words, or teachings.

This is the situation which Jesus addresses in today’s Gospel lesson from Matthew.

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, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. (Matthew 23:1-4 NRSV)

The Scribes and Pharisees – Jewish religious leaders, teachers; with pastoral responsibilities to the Jewish people – are not doing as they teach; they are not practicing what they preach. And Jesus warns the crowds and his disciples to listen to what the Scribes and Pharisees say when it comes to their teachings about the Torah, but do not do as they do because that is not in keeping with the Torah.

It is a strong condemnation of the behavior of the Scribes and Pharisees by Jesus, and a warning to his followers to not be like them. For the Scribes and Pharisees “They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. (Matthew 23:4 NRSV) The Scribes and Pharisees are creating burdens for others – those trying to survive by laboring to earn meager livings, already oppressed by the Roman government.

Rather than serving the Jewish people, the Scribes and Pharisees make their lives harder – all while

wanting it to be easy for themselves. And wanting to be honored and praised. As Jesus tells the crowds and his disciples:

“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.” (Matthew 23:5-7 NRSV)

Phylacteries are small black leather boxes containing passages from Scripture, including the Shema from Deuteronomy – Hear, Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One. (Deuteronomy 6:4 NRSV), the Great Commandment to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and the Ten Commandments. The Phylacteries are strapped to the forehead and left forearm for Jewish morning prayer. The fringes are like tassels on Jewish prayer robes. Jesus comments that the Scribes and Pharisees make the phylacteries larger than they need to be and the fringes longer than they need to be. The Scribes and Pharisees want to be noticed – to be “showy.”

So there is a distinction between liturgical garments and seating to conduct worship, and the reason for such things, which Jesus is making. His point is that the Scribes and Pharisees want to be honored and respected in a way that places the emphasis and focus on them, not God. They teach of God’s word from the Torah, but do not live according to those teachings themselves.

They teach the words found in Deuteronomy – words placed in the Phylacteries they wear for prayer: Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. (Deuteronomy 6:4-6 NRSV). Words from Scripture which contain the Great Commandment, words which God commands for them to keep in their hearts, and, yet, the Scribes and Pharisees do not.

So Jesus tells the crowds and his disciples to listen to the words, and obey the words, but do not live as the Scribes and Pharisees do because they do not live according to the words they teach. Rather they want the focus and honor to be on them, and they burden the people while they want life to be easy for them.

Jesus wants his followers to focus on God and serving others to lift burdens, not add to them. We all, at one point or another, bear burdens in our lives. Illness, care-giving for a family member, addictions, struggles with learning, financial distress, and the list can go on. And we have our collective societal burdens with natural disasters, violence, injustice, oppression, and toxic politics. [...]

The full transcript of the Rev. Jay Lawlor's sermon is available at <https://www.therevjaylawlor.com/good-news-sermon-rev-jay-lawlor-22-pentecost-year-nov-5-2017/>

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