

## Living Lent | Ash Wednesday

Drew Thompson – Union City Church

### The Tragic Need for Secrecy

Today's Reading: Matthew 6:1-6;16-21

*"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."*

**Matthew 6:1-6 ESV**

#### **Encouragement for the Lenten Journey:**

In Christ's Sermon on the Mount, he tells his followers who are poor in spirit, mourning, meek, and thirsting for righteousness, "You are the salt of the earth....You are the light of the world....Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:13-16).

And yet here he is, later in the same sermon, telling us the opposite: Give in secret; pray in

secret; fast in secret. Why the about-face?

Christ tells us in Matthew 6 that although it would be best if we could let our good deeds glorify God before others, there is a possibility that we would pervert those deeds into advertisements of our own goodness. We would write checks and make sure that the financial report goes out far and wide, that we are listed as "gold sponsors" or that our names would be engraved on a window or a bench. "To the glory of God...and in honor of [your name

here]." We would stand before a meal or at a ribbon-cutting, waxing eloquent, so that our prayers would hit the ears of our neighbors, and their "Amen" would bounce back pleasingly into our own. We would attend the monthly lunch, ordering only water so that someone might ask why, and we would get to mention it.

Lent is a season where we are invited to spend time with our propensities to evil and selfishness. And in Matthew 6, the tragic need for secrecy is a stark reminder. How much better things would be if we could put our deeds on a stand so they could light up our families, businesses, and towns with God's glory, God's love, and God's justice!

Instead, for now, we keep them secret. We do this as a confession of our poverty in spirit, and to mourn the loss of what more our good deeds could do if done well. May it create in us that thirst for righteousness for which Christ promised a true filling. Amen.

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#### **Contributor and Contributing Body of Christ:**

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