

BCP EUCHARIST; SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

It seems like a tall order doesn't it; to exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees? After all, they were the professional religious elite who maintained and taught the Teachings or Torah of the Jewish people. And yet, maybe when we consider why they were called Pharisees and what other names they were known by we might have a better understanding as to why Jesus requires those who follow Him to "exceed" beyond their example.

The word Pharisee literally means "separated ones". They held themselves apart from the ordinary people out of self interest, and yet they adhered to the strictness of the law by interpreting it in such a way that they could circumvent them if need be. Separating oneself from others and being seen to teach a strict law while finding ways to work around it opened them to the challenge of being Hypocrites.

Jesus also gave them another name "White washed Sepulchres". From the outside they looked sound and pure, but inside they were full of dead man's bones, decaying and lifeless.

The Essenes whom it is believed wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls, refer to the Pharisees as "Seekers after smooth things." What a wonderful description, but maybe not so wonderful when it meant that these people take the easy way, the smooth way to follow the law.

So we can see how Jesus asks us not to be taken in by the pious, those who seem to know the means to behave and yet, when you scrape below the surface something of the opposite is going on. It is one thing to pontificate about not committing murder while underneath that righteous proclamation you are seething with hatred toward your neighbour and wishing him dead.

So how do we exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees? We know that being religious isn't necessarily the answer because the Pharisees were very religious. It isn't just about being good, there are lots of people who are good but will have nothing to do with Jesus and the Church. What it is about is seeking the Kingdom of God within. In responding to the Pharisees in Luke's Gospel Ch 17, Jesus tells them "for indeed the Kingdom of God is within you." Now how can the Kingdom of God, the dwelling place of God, and from where

the entire Gospel values of peace and patience and kindness and goodness and fidelity and gentleness and self control, be also a place where murderous thoughts and hatred are harboured? The dark cannot live in the light. If the inward still holds to the "old man" as St Paul says, that disposition that still clings to and manifests sinful thoughts that so often get turned into sinful actions, how can we proclaim the New Man, Christ, the embodiment of the Kingdom without first coming to the Altar of God with a new and penitent heart?

Our life as Christians must be a constant reaching forward toward a perfection that witnesses fully to the Kingdom, only that way will we excel in righteousness and show that the Kingdom is real and God is near.

AMEN