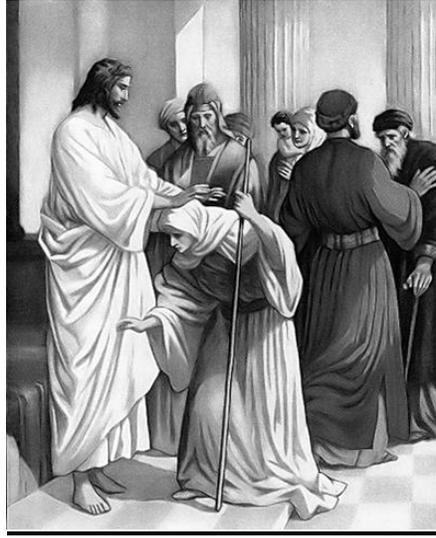


HYPOCRITES R US!



Scripture:

Psalm 103:1-8

¹Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. ²Bless the LORD, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits— ³who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, ⁴who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, ⁵who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

⁶The LORD works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed. ⁷He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel. ⁸The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

Luke 13:10-17

¹⁰Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. ¹¹And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. ¹²When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." ¹³When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. ¹⁴But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day." ¹⁵But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? ¹⁶And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?" ¹⁷When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



I've still been watching the Olympics in between my travels this past week. Have you noticed that the Rio Olympics has a special image of Jesus at the beginning of the NBC broadcast? Every evening when the broadcast begins, they play the familiar Olympics theme song and show the five circles floating above Rio. Then they pan across a mountain top where the Cristo Redento stands, that gorgeous white soapstone statue of Jesus with his massive arms outstretched. They present a glorious view of Rio from the vantage point of looking

over the shoulder of Jesus gazing down on the buildings and shoreline of the city.

Cristo Redento is Portuguese for Christ Redeemer. This statue of Jesus is one of the Seven New Wonders of the World. It made the list because it is the largest art deco Christ sculpture in the world standing 98 feet high and weighing seven-hundred tons. It was created in 1931 out of concrete and steel covered by pure Brazilian soapstone, a beautiful collaboration by Romanian, French and Brazilian artists.

RIO'S MURDER RATE ONE OF HIGHEST

I think the people of Rio must be very proud of their iconic statue recognized around the world. But isn't it sad that the country Cristo Redento is looking over has one of the highest murder rates in all the world? Of the fifty most dangerous cities in the world, Brazil has twenty of them. The police are known to be corrupt and they have a history of killing street children as if they were rats infesting their city.

The United Nations recently documented a statement against the Rio police for killing street children to "clean the streets" ahead of the Olympic Games.

The charge, which appeared in a report on the treatment of youth around the world, claims that Brazil's military police are directly linked to the "elevated number of executions of children," which has been facilitated by "widespread impunity." In other words, the police who kill street children are not punished.

According to Renate Winter, vice president of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, this latest wave of violence against children is not new for Brazil, but has increased in Rio de Janeiro in order to "present a problem-free city to the world."

In July, a UNICEF report found that twenty-eight people under the age of nineteen were killed every day in Brazil. That is eight-hundred-forty in one month.

This information has not been in our news in the United States, but it was published in the International Business Times in an article titled: *Road to Rio: Police Sweep Away Street Children Ahead of Brazil Olympics* and another article entitled: *UN Body Accuses Brazil's military police of killing kids to clean up the streets for the Olympics* can be found on the online news bulletin TeleSUR.

When I ponder this tragedy, I imagine the Cristo Redento statue with tears coming down from Christ's eyes. Jesus weeps over injustice and violence no matter where it occurs. Brazil appears to revere Jesus Christ, and yet it allows unspeakable violence against their most vulnerable children. It seems very hypocritical, doesn't it?

PRACTICING WHAT WE PREACH

But as the Bible says, we must take the log out of our own eyes before we take the splinter out of the eyes of others. Where are we hypocritical in this country? We proudly say we are a country founded on Christian values. We hold up Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness and Justice as the hallmarks of our constitution, and we pride ourselves on our tolerance of religious and ethnic diversity. But do we really practice what we preach in this country? Practicing what we preach starts at home and in church, doesn't it?

Years ago, before I went to seminary, I was asked by a relative why I attended church. I explained how I felt I

needed a reminder of my faith every week. The sermons recharged my spiritual battery and helped me remember what was important in life. I told him how I felt empty inside when I didn't go. It had been such a routine since childhood. Even on vacation we would find a place to worship if the vacation lasted over a weekend.

My brother-in-law replied to my explanation with this: he said, "Well, I think the church is full of hypocrites! So I don't go."

"Churches are full of hypocrites." Do you agree with him?

My answer to him then was, "Yes, we are all hypocrites at times, and what better place for a hypocrite to be than in a church? At least there is hope for change or improvement in church if they really listen and are open to change, trying harder to be more like Jesus every day."

He didn't say anything back. But he did start going to church again a few years later and he met his wife there. They are still happily married, and attend church together. I guess he found a fellow hypocrite.

WHAT IS A HYPOCRITE?

What exactly is a hypocrite? According to an online dictionary, hypocrite is defined as:

- 1: a person who puts on a false appearance of virtue or religion.
- 2: a person who acts in contradiction to his or her stated beliefs or feelings.

This reminds me of the passage where Paul says to the church in Romans 3:23, "We all fall short of the glory of God."

Yes we do. And God understands that we are only human. That is part of the Christian way, realizing that we fall short and sin even when we don't mean to. But that verse in Romans is followed by verse 24 that says, "And we are justified freely by his grace and through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

Even if we miss the mark, we are to never give up trying to be like Jesus, because we are redeemed. In the context of loving your enemies, Jesus said, "Be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect." That is a tall order!

Jesus also instructs us to never be too proud to ask for forgiveness when we fail. We know deep in our hearts that nothing separates us from the love of God, not even when we are hypocrites like the Pharisees in this passage for today.

In this account of Christ healing the crippled woman, Jesus does not hold back his anger and disgust in response to being admonished by the Pharisees. This is one of the few times Jesus shows his rage at injustice.

(The other time is when he turns over the tables of the money-changers in the temple for taking advantage of the poor.) But also this isn't the first time Jesus was admonished by the Jewish leaders for healing people on the Sabbath.

JESUS HEALS ON THE SABBATH

Jesus heals the sick on the sabbath seven times in total. Today's healing was the fifth time he healed on the sabbath. Wouldn't you think the Jewish leadership would figure out that after the third time God doesn't agree with their legal interpretation of the command to keep the sabbath holy?

Jesus was not a hypocrite. He practiced what he preached all the time. He preached healing and wholeness and salvation for all through God's unconditional grace and love.

Jesus came to show us the way, the truth and the light of God through healing and forgiveness. And he let nothing stop him, not even the manmade Jewish law that no work should be done on the sabbath. Nothing stopped Jesus from his healing mission, not even the cross. And nothing should stop us from imitating him, even the human tendency to be hypocrites.

Did you notice at the end of today's passage that the crowd around Jesus was rejoicing when the crippled woman was healed, but the "spiritual leaders" were not?

Do we ever act this way? Are we judgmental, self-centered, worried about following the rules rather than being compassionate to someone in desperate need of help?

I wonder if the leaders in the temple would have admonished Jesus if the one who received the healing was one of them. Was he admonished because the bent-over-woman was of low status who meant nothing to the temple leaders? What if she had been a male Pharisee? Would they have complained?

CHRIST'S PREFERENCE FOR THE POOR

Jesus knew more than what the leaders said with their mouths. Jesus knew their hearts. Maybe Jesus knew they were mad, not just because Jesus healed on the sabbath but because he healed someone of little value to the leaders of the temple. But that is who Jesus preferred to heal. When Jesus healed, the majority of those he healed were those of low status and of little value to society.

This is called "Christ's preference for the poor." He was an advocate for the oppressed and lowly more than any other class of people. Although he healed the

daughter of the wealthy Roman official and a few others of higher status, the groups that Jesus spent the most time with were the nobodies, the outcasts, the aliens, the victimized, and he liberated the least of these from their ailments.

LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Gustavo Gutierrez is known as the founder of liberation theology. He summed up the hope for his life at age eighty-three by saying, "I hope my life tries to give testimony to the message of the Gospel, above all that God loves the world and loves those who are poorest within it."

He coined the phrase "the preferential option for the poor." In his books, Gutierrez explains God's preferential love for the poor and our own need to side with the poor and oppressed everywhere in their struggle for justice." Pope Francis is a big fan of Gutierrez and his liberation theology.

But it's really hard to take time for the poor when we have shopping to do and homes to repair and parties to host. Right? Let's be honest with ourselves. We would rather cheer for the Olympians and admire the beautiful views of Rio rather than face the reality that children are being gunned down on their streets everyday.

And that is happening on our streets as well. In 2015, one-hundred-two unarmed black people were killed by police in our nation. Despite making up only two per cent of the total US population, African American males between the ages of fifteen and thirty-four (young people) comprised more than fifteen per cent of all deaths recorded last year by an ongoing investigation into the use of deadly force by police. The number of police-involved deaths of black men was five times higher than for white men of the same age.

So far in 2016, six-hundred-eighty-five people have been killed by our police forces. The overwhelming majority have been black, Native American and Hispanic.

WHERE DO WE NEED HEALING AND COMPASSION?

Jesus calls us to examine where we ourselves and where our country needs healing and compassion. Where do we need cleansing from prejudice and harsh judgment of the poor and those with mental illness? When Jesus says, "Come all who are weary and heavy laden," he is calling all who suffer in this life, all who become crippled physically or mentally or both, the prisoner, the immigrant, the refugee, the aged, the addicted, the mentally ill, the orphaned and the hypocrites.

So now, as true Christ following Christians, we must seek out those in need and facilitate their healing through the power of the Holy Spirit that is given to each of us. Your authentic love for the less fortunate is

powerful because it comes from God if you choose to love.

Today you might be feeling like you are in need of love from God and the hand of Jesus to straighten out your life. If so, please let us know how we, your church family, can be helpful.

Let's all carry on doing our best to practice what we preach: that Jesus is our Lord and Savior and sincerely reach out with nurturing love to all God's people, even to other hypocrites like us.

I will close with the first half of Ann Weems poem entitled *The Lord of Life* from her book, *Reaching for Rainbows*. Last week I printed the last half of this long poem on the bulletin cover. Listen as she addresses us, the church, in this powerful poem/prayer:

THE LORD OF LIFE

O, Lord, we're playing Pharisee again, more interested
in the Sunday morning count than in the
feeding of your sheep,
More interested in stars for our crowns than in that cup
of cold water, more interested in the
tradition and appearance,
than in the following of our Lord.
O Lord we are playing Pharisee again,
Playing at church and making excuses for not being real
Not me, not now, Not with my income,
Not with all I have to do!
Or making "after all" speeches,
After all, I give more than the others,
After all, I have five children,
After all, I haven't been feeling well.
Or putting God off:
As soon as we get the house paid for
As soon as we get the kids through college
As soon as we get the painting finished...
Christ was crucified for saying, "Follow me now."
He was crucified for saying
"You're storing up the wrong treasures!"
"Feed my Sheep!" "Love God with
everything you've got!"

O Lord, Open our eyes to see the Pharisee within us.
Open our ears that we might hear the prophecy
of the possibility of change,
Open the church doors that we might follow our Living
Loving Lord out into the marketplace.

Amen

Benediction:

May we continue to strive everyday to be non-hypocritical disciples of Christ.

So I challenge you to find a way to save the life of at least one child somewhere in the world this week, because Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me." He said this in an ancient time and place where orphaned children were routinely mistreated. And it is still happening today.

Supporting UNICEF is a good place to start. This year their campaign is called *Give Children a Chance*. You can download their report on the State of the World's Children 2016 from their website.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen



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