

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles
Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost – November 5, 2017
Communion * All Saints
Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister

Matthew 23:1-12

FOR REFLECTION

**“The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains.
The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires.”**

- William Arthur Ward, American writer (1921-1994)

Teaching and Doing

You may have heard me say this before, but it bears repeating. On the Island of Timor in Indonesia deeply Christian man spoke with me about church people who “comb their hair with Christianity.” They talked about their faith and tried to look like they were sincere. But their actions proved otherwise. Christianity went no further than their “hair.”

Apparently, Jesus – and Matthew – shared the same experience in their times. Religious people – religious leaders – said one thing and did another. They preached humility and sought privilege. And in 2000 years, nothing has changed about that.

So, with an awareness of rampant hypocrisy, where do we find our role models? Who do we learn from and pattern our actions after? How do we avoid just “combing our hair” with our values and beliefs?

I found an unlikely source of inspiration online this week. Tim Minchin, an Australian comedian, actor, writer, musician, director, gave the Commencement Address at the University of Western Australia, his alma mater. I have no memory of the commencement speaker at my college – but this man was simple and eloquent – and memorable. Here are his 9 life lessons. *[If you are reading this online, I suggest going to the video and listening to Tim. It will be a well-spent 6 minutes.]*

1. You don't have to have a dream. [We can get too focused way out into the future and forget to live where we are. We can also miss opportunities that present themselves now. He advocates:] passionate dedication to the pursuit of short term goals.

2. Don't seek happiness. If you think about it too much it goes away. Keep busy and aim to make someone else happy. You might get some as a side-effect.

3. Remember, it's all luck. We're lucky to be born, to be here, to succeed. [Can't take credit for all that we have. Learn some empathy.]

4. Exercise. [It will serve your body well over the 100 years we are living – and help you to avoid existential angst.]

5. Be hard on your opinions. They should be constantly and thoroughly examined. Identify your biases and prejudices. [Learn from the opinions of others.]

6. Be a teacher. Rejoice in what you learn and spray it.

7. Define yourself by what you love. We have a tendency to define ourselves in opposition to stuff. [e.g. Cold War] Try to express passion about the things you love.

8. Respect people with less power than you.

9. Don't rush. You don't already need to know what you're going to do for the rest of your life. Life is best when you:

- * Learn as much as you can about as much as you can.
- * Take pride in whatever you're doing.
- * Have compassion, share ideas, run, be enthusiastic.

And then there's love, travel, wine, sex, art, kids, giving, mountain-climbing.

Tim Minchin (b.1975) Australian comedian, actor, writer, musician, director
Commencement Address. The University of Western Australia
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lki4393ujMQ>

This is some of the best advice I've ever heard. It's realistic. It's born of experience. And it advocates compassion and humility. And, it lines up with my value system – about which I need reminders daily.

A piece of advice that has saved my life repeatedly is something I picked up at Al Anon, the 12-step program for co-dependent people. Other people's feelings and reactions belong to them, not to me. So, when I'm inclined to take responsibility for someone else's unhappiness or anger, I use this mantra: "That's about them, not about me." I use it often. It helps. I'm grateful to Al Anon for that and many other tools for life.

What is something valuable that you learned along the way – and who did you learn it from?

Any number of people have recommended the book ON TYRANNY: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century by Timothy Snyder. I recommend it as well and gave a copy to my dentist. There are two copies in the church library. Jim Burklo is having a discussion on this book and subsequent actions at his home next Sunday at 5 p.m. Consider participating. It is a way to avoid hypocrisy and live out our values in a congruent, deeply relevant way.

Let's learn from others and practice what we teach.

Let's do more with our faith than comb our hair with it.

Scripture Reading for Sunday November 5, 2017 – Pentecost 22 – Year A

Matthew 23:1-12

1 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, 2 "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; 3 therefore, **do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach.** 4 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. 5 **They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long.** 6 **They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, 7 and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have people call them rabbi.*** 8 But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. 9 And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father--the one in heaven. 10 Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah. 11 The greatest among you will be your servant. 12 All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted."

*pink

Dear friends:

I am sure you share my deep concerns about the survival of democracy in America in our current circumstances. I read a short, pithy book recently which expressed these concerns with crystalline clarity: ON TYRANNY: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century by Yale historian, Timothy Snyder.

I would like to invite you to our house on **Nov 12, Sun, 5 pm, for** vegetarian stew and a stewy conversation about this book and its critical subject matter. We'll read aloud the chapter openings and discuss them. Bring your copy if you have one. I'll briefly introduce a ritual and a vote-list sharing process I'm hoping will encourage people to vote in every election.

My hope is that many millions of people will read Snyder's book and take its message to heart and from there to action. This book is on a par with Tom Paine's very widely-read "Common Sense" in 1776, which lit the fire of the American independence movement.

America can lose its freedom. The Constitution can become a worthless piece of paper. Saving democracy starts with keen awareness of the current very real threat against it.

All politics is local, as they say - and it's true. Let's be local allies in preserving democracy by practicing it together.

Let me know if you'll join us on Nov 12.

Jim Burklo and Roberta Maran:

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Yours, Jim Burklo