

Monday

Read Luke 6:43-45

Halloween is upon us and many will be dressed up in fun or scary costumes. Sometimes the costumes are so good it is hard to tell who the person is behind the mask and makeup. We often put a lot of effort into our lives to be perceived by others a certain way and we very much do this when we are trying to communicate to others how good of Christians we are. Ultimately, Jesus says in this passage, it doesn't work. God isn't fooled and people won't be fooled forever. You might dress up like a fig tree but God sees that you are thornbush. You might pretend to be a grape vine, but people will see – one way or another – that you are a bramble bush. It is hard work to look like a fig tree when you are not a fig tree.

As we think and study about being pure of heart this week, a first step is being genuine in who you are and the first place you need to be genuine is with yourself and with God. Take some time today to pray to ask God to help you see where you are posing and not being genuine. Ask the Holy Spirit to support you in showing who you really are and for the strength to become more and more who Jesus is calling you to be. There is a remarkable freedom in trusting yourself to the Lord and embracing who you are today with the certain hope that you are never outside of God's care and God is forming you into being who God is making you to be: more like Jesus Christ.

Tuesday

Read Matthew 5:8

The good news is that your purity before God does not rest on your shoulders, your purity rests on Jesus. Jesus is the only one truly pure in heart. The rest of us have been marred by sin. As the only one pure in heart, Jesus is the only one who fills the great

commandments of loving God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength, and of loving his fellow humans with that same love. Jesus never returned evil for evil but overcame evil with good. He trusted God in all his suffering and did not become bitter or resentful. He never deceived but only spoke the truth in love. He never took advantage of another person. He met every temptation and was not overcome by temptation into sin. Only Jesus did all these things and the whole will of God perfectly.

Only Jesus presented his whole life as a living sacrifice to God. Jesus offered up his perfection as a replacement for our sinful imperfection. God accepted Jesus' sacrifice of himself and imputes the purity, holiness, and perfection of Jesus onto us as if we were Jesus. The truth I told the children a few moments ago is a truth I want you to know deeply: because of your faith in the resurrected Jesus – your acceptance of his sacrifice on your behalf – when God looks at you, God does not see a hopeless sinner, God sees Jesus. You receive purity in heart by grace through faith in Jesus.

Wednesday

Matthew 6:1-18

Jesus teaches that we should do many things in our life of devotion and faith in secret and yet this is also the Jesus who tells these same disciples to go out and make disciples of all nations. Our whole lives of faith are not to be hidden but we must beware of our motivation for those acts that we do that are clearly motivated by faith like giving, praying, spiritual disciplines, and serving the church.

Your faith shouldn't be top secret, but you must consider who you are trying to please when you live your faith. Jesus says that if you are motivated by the praise of people, that is all the more reward you will get, and the poser knows the ultimate emptiness of that praise. But God knows your motivations and will reward you for your devotion to pursuing purity before God and not people.

How can you be the hands and feet of Jesus in serving others today in ways that no one will know?

Thursday

Read Matthew 5:1-12

The late great Christian writer and theologian Dallas Willard was renowned for his spiritual insight but was sometimes criticized for seeming to focus too much on Christians being personally transformed and not focusing enough on social issues. Many people wanted to know where he stood as a Christian on all kinds of hot-button issues and he almost always wouldn't provide an answer that gave away what "side" he was on. A doctoral student named Gary Beck was doing his dissertation on Dallas Willard and interviewed many people to get a greater sense of Willard's work and impact. Beck interviewed a pastor from South Africa who told of how Willard had gone to South Africa several times in the apartheid era to encourage faith leaders to advocate for the release of Nelson Mandela and the end of apartheid. This seemed out of character to the researcher as this was too much of a hot-button issue in the 1980's. So, Beck asked Willard's wife, who had not gone on these trips, about Dallas' time in South Africa, but she didn't know much. Finally, Beck asked Dallas Willard himself about his work in South Africa and he refused to talk about it whatsoever. Now that is keeping your work before the Lord and not seeking the praise of people. His work was very public, but he didn't want or need to be of public acclaim for the work he felt called to do by Christ.

Pray that you would take this example to heart today. Purity in heart goes with being meek and merciful!

Friday

Please prayerfully read and reflect upon Ephesians 2:11-22 and Matthew 5:9.