

## Ash Wednesday: 2008

### Don't make a big noise:

Lent is a time in our church life when we are encouraged to take a long hard look at our lives and how well we are doing in relation to God's instructions, to review how we relate to others, how we fare in our own self-worth.

It has been said that everyone's life has two sides to it, the public side and the private or secret side. One – the public – is that part of our lives that others may know more about for it is the one we allow people to see, plus some can tend to fill up our public life with good deeds done to be noticed and to receive praise for.

The other is the private or secret side where we keep our sins and fears from the eyes of others and is the one that only God and oneself know about.

In our reading from Matthew we see that when we give alms (money) or gifts to the poor, or time to a needy cause, we should do so in secret, not for public recognition. Some things we do will of their own attract recognition for many of our deeds will be in the public forum. i.e. when we talk kindly to the clerk at the checkout we are letting our light shine and it will be seen. However we are not to do good works with the thought of praise and recognition and we need to take a long hard look at our motives in doing a good deed.

As we do our works we like to know that it was up to scratch or acceptable, we like to get pats on the back or words of encouragement for what we have done. It is great if they come but we are not to do our works with the sole purpose of big noting ourselves.

When we do give of ourselves and do so in secret God knows what we have done and rewards us with treasure in heaven.

Our times of prayer are also to be done in the right spirit. No as our reading says longwinded or for public notoriety so that our religiosity shows out, but in private or corporate worship and in a humble and personal fashion where God is the focus not ourselves and it is God that will acknowledge our prayers.

In Jesus words on prayer he shows that we need to confess our sins, and seek forgiveness not keep them secretive: Rom 3:23.

Many times our natural instinct when we recognize as Christians that we have sinned, is to confess those sins to God. Quite often, however, it stops there. Perhaps we confess the same sin over and over again to the Lord and yet continue to struggle with its effects in our lives. In some (but certainly not all) cases, sin can lead to physical illness [*1 Corinthians 11:29-30; Revelation 2:21-22; 2Chronicles 26:16-23*]. To this James says, “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.” [*James 5:16*]

So regardless of the current consequences of our sin (whether or not we have a physical illness), it is certainly not desirable to hide our sins. The Bible says that “He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.” [*Proverbs 28:13*]. I believe that this confession is not only to God, but also before man. Many people came to be baptized by John the Baptist, and they also confessed their sins. [*Matthew 3:6*] In Nehemiah chapter 9, the Israelites gathered together to openly confess their sins.

In my own life, I have seen that when I confess my sins not only to God, but to my wife or a friend, that often times my repentance is even more genuine. I do not believe that we should tell everyone we know about every sin we have committed, but if we look at our secret life, what do we see? Is it filled to the brim with sin? Have we moved any sins from the “Secret compartment” to the “Public compartment”? So sometimes it is right to let people into our private lives for in it we can find support in overcoming sins.

Also when we fast we are not to fast in the same way. We are not to make a public showing of our fast, but are to put on a joyful countenance, in other words a smile on our face and in our hearts. Once again our Heavenly Father who sees all, knows where we are at.

The Pharisees of old would wear on their heads dust and ashes, and walk around making a big spectacle of themselves, they were showing their piety to all. Any reward that they received was an earthly reward and diminished the value and effect of their worship. For that is what fasting is, a form of worship of God and as just as when we big note ourselves and do our acts of righteousness to be seen by others, we diminish our worship of God and we forfeit God’s reward for man’s fleeting and meaningless recognition.

Fasting that requires spectators is mere acting before an audience. For Jesus did not institute fasting for his Disciples, for the act of fasting is a voluntary act of honouring God and allowing ourselves to focus on our relationship with God through Christ and make whatever changes that require to be made in our lives through repentance.

**Also let us not forget that God will open up our secret lives and judge what he finds there, In fact God says that there is nothing in our secret lives that will not ultimately be made public. Of course the bible passage before us, says that we will be rewarded for those good deeds done in secret, but what of all the hidden sins? Will they be hidden forever? Jesus in Luke 12:2- 3 says NO, everything will be made public.**

**What a scary thought.**

**So what do we do now on this Ash Wednesday and Lenten season? For if we know that God tells us to do our good deeds in secret, and to confess our sins to one another and we don't do it, we are like the man who built his house upon the sand – Matthew 7:24-27, Jesus tells us in this to put his words into practice for them we are like the man who built his house on the rock and planned in advance for any storms.**

**It is these thought that bring us to repent of our sins and to seek God's forgiveness, and it is through the time of lent that we are encouraged review our lives, make what changes are necessary in the way we do our good works and how we prioritaries our live, to open ourselves afresh to the teaching of Jesus and to go down the right path and seek a renewed relationship with God.**

**May your journey through lent be a time of revival and refreshment in your spirit and your relationship with God through Christ.**