



## Worship resources

### INTRODUCTIONS

*For use by lectors, in order of service, parish bulletins and magazines*

#### **The First Reading** - Joshua 3: 7-17

Joshua tells of the conquest of the Promised Land (Palestine). God had promised to their forefathers that they would one day occupy this territory. The book begins with the crossing of the Jordan. It then relates the stories of military victories, achieved under his guidance, through which the people of Israel came to control all of the hill country and the Negev Desert. It describes the allotment of land to each of the tribes and ends with Joshua's final address to the people.

#### **The Psalm** - Psalm 107: 1-7, 33-37

#### **The Second Reading** - 1 Thessalonians 2: 9-13

This letter is perhaps the oldest book in the New Testament. Paul (with Silvanus and Timothy) founded the church there during his second missionary journey, and as is recorded in Acts 17, was forced to leave the city due to persecution. Many Greeks who already worshipped God, many pagans and "important women" became Christians. The letter was written from Athens to strengthen the new Christians in their faith.

#### **The Gospel Reading** - Matthew 23: 1-12

This gospel is the first in the New Testament, but it was probably the second to be written. Scholars recognize that it borrows material from Mark, and from a *sayings* source containing sayings of Jesus and known as Q (for *Quelle*, German for *source*). The author shows an understanding of Jewish culture and religion not found in the other gospels. It was probably written about 60 to 70 AD, possibly for a largely Jewish audience.

[Click here to view the readings](#)

## The Fourth Sunday before Advent YEAR A November 2, 2013

[http://bible.oremus.org/?show\\_adj=no&passages=Joshua%203:%207-17%0Acw%20Psalm%20107:%201-7,%2033-37%0A1%20Thessalonians%202:%209-13%0AMatthew%2023:%201-12](http://bible.oremus.org/?show_adj=no&passages=Joshua%203:%207-17%0Acw%20Psalm%20107:%201-7,%2033-37%0A1%20Thessalonians%202:%209-13%0AMatthew%2023:%201-12)

### COLLECTS OF THE DAY

#### COLLECT ONE

O God, our refuge and strength,  
who art the author of all godliness;  
Be ready, we beseech thee, to hear  
the devout prayers of thy Church;  
and grant that those things which we ask faithfully  
we may obtain effectually;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

#### COLLECT TWO

Almighty and eternal God,  
you have kindled the flame of love in the hearts of the saints:  
Grant to us the same faith and power of love,  
that, as we rejoice in their triumphs,  
we may be sustained by their example and fellowship;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

### PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 1

That we might willingly join Christ's banquet table and, as willingly, welcome others, let us pray, saying, "Lord in your mercy," and respond, "Hear our prayer."

For all who are baptized, that we might learn to love one another because of our differences, not in spite of them.

Lord in your mercy,  
**Hear our prayer.**

For this world which does not seem to tire of war and killing, that it might embrace the vision of peace proclaimed by the church.  
Lord in your mercy,  
**Hear our prayer.**

For those in need of our prayers: the unemployed, the under-employed, the weary, the sick, the sorrowful and the homeless, that they might know fullness on earth as in heaven.  
Lord in your mercy,  
**Hear our prayer.**

For all confirmees, that they might join government leaders, leaders of the church, those who are baptized and non-church groups in building a society of compassion and justice.  
Lord in your mercy,  
**Hear our prayer.**

God of Grace, give us courage to set a table for all people, regardless of race or

class or gender, for the sake of Christ. **Amen.**

## **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 2**

### *President*

Let us pray to our Father in heaven that his will may be done on earth, the good news of his kingdom proclaimed throughout the world and that all people will be led into his glory.

### *Prayers*

Father, we pray for the unity of your church. We pray that we, and all who worship you, will remain faithful and true to your word brought to life in our Lord, Jesus Christ.

We pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ who face persecution, torture and death because of their faith. Help us to use our freedom to work for their liberation.

We pray for nations at war against nation. Defend us from alarm and fear when we hear of wars and rumours of wars. Keep us firm in faith and hope that you will bring healing for the kingdoms of this world.

We pray for those whose lives have been broken by famines, earthquakes, floods and disease. Help us to work for the relief of those who suffer now and for the prevention of further suffering and loss of life.

### *President*

Father in heaven, receive our prayers for this broken and suffering world and bring us into your eternal kingdom where every tear will be wiped away and there will be an end to mourning, crying and pain and your glory will be fully revealed through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

## **POST COMMUNION**

Lord of heaven,  
in this eucharist you have brought us near  
to an innumerable company of angels  
and to the spirits of the saints made perfect.  
As in this food of our earthly pilgrimage  
we have shared their fellowship,  
so may we come to share their joy in heaven;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

## PRAYERS

O Holy God of Israel,  
you faithfully keep the promises  
you made to our ancestors  
and lead your people into the future,  
providing hospitality on the way.  
Help us who inherit the pilgrim life  
to journey faithfully at your command,  
that we may be a band of disciples  
called to be sojourners in your service. Amen.

God of captives and pilgrims,  
you brought your people home from despair  
and gave them a land of freedom and plenty.  
Look in mercy on us your servants,  
deliver us from the prison of selfishness and sin,  
and bring us home to justice, sharing, and compassion,  
the realm you promised all the world  
in Jesus Christ the Saviour. Amen.

Your steadfast love endures from age to age, O living God,  
for in Christ you tenderly care for your people.  
Instruct us in your way of humble service,  
that we may imitate his saving deeds  
who humbled himself for our salvation  
and is now exalted with you in splendor  
for ever and ever. Amen.

O God, your Spirit speaks through your prophets,  
protecting your people  
from those who would lead them astray.  
Raise up new voices in our time  
to speak with justice and power  
and to challenge the complacency  
that would have us rest easily with sin. Amen.

Stir up, O Lord,  
the wills of your faithful people to seek more eagerly the help you offer,  
that, at the last,  
they may enjoy the fruit of salvation;  
through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Redeeming Sustainer,  
visit your people  
and pour out your strength and courage upon us,  
that we may hurry to make you welcome  
not only in our concern for others,  
but by serving them  
generously and faithfully in your name. Amen.

Your steadfast love endures from age to age, O living God,  
for un Christ you tenderly care for your people.  
Instruct us in your way of humble service,  
that we may imitate his saving deeds  
who humbled himself for our salvation  
and is now exalted with you in splendor  
for ever and ever. Amen.

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## SERMON

### JESUS ON THE ATTACK

**Matthew 23: 2-3** *Jesus said:*

*“The specialists in the law and the Pharisees like to think they are sitting in the chair of Moses. You should follow their words, pay attention to their teaching. But never follow the way they live! For they say one thing yet do another.” Matthew 23:2-3*

Thus begins a chapter of the most remarkable invective from the lips of the man who was most noted for his compassion. Jesus goes on the attack. Matthew chapter 23 stands alone in the New Testament for the extent of its caustic language.

Had Jesus turned feral? Was this an aberration? Had he lost it for a few minutes during the pressures of that last week? Can one be a truly loving person and yet come out criticisms like this?

It gets worse, though. Our lectionary selection stops at verse 12. Verse 13 launches the full blast. Jesus labels the self-righteous leaders in Jerusalem as-

hypocrites

deceivers

blind guides

fools

whitewashed tombs full of decaying bodies

murderers

snakes and vipers

creatures fit for hell.

What do we make of this attack? Is it compatible with the idea that Jesus was the most loving of men?

There are a few things we should try to keep in mind.

**1/ Not all the Pharisees were corrupt.** People like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathaea, were of a different mind. There were many loving and open minded rabbis in that land. Just as there are today. From contemporary Israel we often see film footage of the extremists and their hatred of the dispossessed Palestinian people. But not all Jews are like that. There are in Israel frequent protest marches from those who want no part in such bigotry.

We cannot tar all Jews with the same brush. Today, and back in the time of Jesus, there are as many extremes as there are in Christianity.

Matthew gives it the full treatment, sparing no detail, because he was writing out of the bitter experience of the early church. That church had to make its way constantly hounded by critics from Jerusalem who would come along after a church was established and try to destabilise it. Like Saul of Tarsus, who before his miraculous conversion set out to imprison Christians and eliminate them from the face of the earth.

But not all Jews, not all rabbis, were like those to whom this invective of Jesus was directed.

When I was in Pilgrim Church in central Adelaide, we regularly took candidates for confirmation to worship at a nearby Jewish synagogue. We felt it important for those prospective members of the body of Christ to get a feel for their Biblical roots. We were always made most welcome and cordially engaged in conversation in the fellowship cup after worship. We were among wonderful, open-minded, big-hearted, sincere believers in the loving God of Abraham and Sarah, Moses, Ruth, Judith and Isaiah.

Not all Jews were obdurate Pharisees. That outburst in Matthew 23 reflects Jesus' frustration with those with closed minds and hard hearts. Those especially at the centre of influence in the capital of Jerusalem who were intent on having him exterminated.

**2/ Jesus was especially committed to all the hungry, poor, misused, ordinary people of the land.**

On the side of all those who suffered at the hands of the power brokers. Those common folk who were like sheep without a shepherd, under attack from wolves. Jesus loved these common people passionately.

He saw some of those haughty Pharisees making themselves feel big by putting these poor folk down. Such self-righteous men lauded it over the struggling, poor people. Should the poor come for spiritual comfort, they received not encouragement from such aloof rabbis, but were given even heavier religious burdens to bear.

These religious elite hated Jesus because he loved the common people who listened eagerly to his teaching. Those ordinary folk found for themselves that Christ's "yoke was easy and his burden was light." Jesus did not come condemning them, nor laying additional religious duties on their long-suffering shoulders. He came among them to heal and to lift them up out of their misery.

Much of his anger was on their behalf.

### **3/ Jesus loved even those hard hearted Pharisees.**

But they would not allow him to show that love. Therefore Jesus had to be like a surgeon: When an infection needed lancing, Jesus was not in the game of pretending an evil thing was not there. He was not willing to apply a comforting poultice. He had to take out the knife if the patient was to have any hope. And he did. His words in Chapter 23 are like one very sharp scalpel!

Love and hard words are not necessarily opposites. A rebuke in some circumstances can carry as much (or more) love as a word of comfort.

We will never know how many were pulled up short by Jesus' outspoken words. How many came later to repent. Or how many may have amended their ways and (like Saul) become his devoted followers.

### **4/ How much of this attack applies to us?**

I guess what we should ask ourselves as we read this passage is: "In what way does this drastic surgery apply to our situation today?"

Think with me for a moment about that word hypocrite. It originally meant one who acted on the stage. One who was playing a part. At first the word had no religious or moral taint. Later it became used for those who were insincere.

A hypocrite then, is one who words do not come from his heart, and whose deeds have no intentions of matching his professed beliefs.

Please don't misunderstand this.

There is a gulf between a sincere Christian who tries hard yet fails often, and a pretend Christian who never has any intention of trusting Christ with all their heart and soul and mind. The sincere battlers are not hypocrites. Those whose religion is an act are the present day hypocrites.

However, having said that, I ask you to turn the scalpel of Christ's words on yourself. I am not your judge. Neither is anyone else in this congregation. Let Christ be the only one who assesses where you are at in the matter.

How far is your heart in the business of Christ? If it is not, even though you may try to live a good life, then you are among the members of the church to be much pitied. For if your heart is not in it, then religion will become either a burden or you will lapse into patterns of outwardly respectable hypocrisy.

To be among those who outwardly *say one thing yet do another* is to choose a path that leads to misery. Sooner or later, misery.

That applies to both congregations and their pastors. Those present not excepted.

### **ONLINE SERMON SOURCES**

["Joshua."](#) Frederick Buechner Sermon Illustrations.

## The Fourth Sunday before Advent YEAR A November 2, 2013

<http://frederickbuechner.com/content/weekly-sermon-illustration-joshua>

[Practice What You Preach](http://day1.org/3298-practice-what-you-preach), the Rev. Dr. Kris Lewis, *Day 1*,  
<http://day1.org/3298-practice-what-you-preach>

Matthew 24:1 -14 - first published by Redemptorist Publications  
<http://www.katharinesmith.org.uk/common-worship-lectionary/year-a-sundays-before-advent/sermon-and-intercessions-for-the-fourth-sunday-before-advent-year-a/>

### CHILDREN

[Worshiping with Children](http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2011/09/year-proper-26-31st-sunday-in-ordinary.html), Proper 26, Including children in the congregation's worship, using the Revised Common Lectionary, Carolyn C. Brown  
<http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2011/09/year-proper-26-31st-sunday-in-ordinary.html>

"[Sermon of the Week,](http://www.sermons4kids.com/)" / "[Mensajes para ninos,](http://www.sermons4kids.com/)" Sermons 4 Kids, Charles Kirkpatrick, Object Lessons & Children's Sermons, Coloring Pages, Puzzles. <http://www.sermons4kids.com/>

"[A Good Day Ends with Dirty Feet,](http://onthechancelsteps.wordpress.com/2011/10/17/dirty-feet/)" Proper 26A, Frances Woodruff, *On the Chancel Steps*.  
<http://onthechancelsteps.wordpress.com/2011/10/17/dirty-feet/>

"[A Halloween Adventure](http://annashosannas.net/Ordinary-Time-31A.php)" Children's Sermon from Anna's Hosannas, for October 30  
<http://annashosannas.net/Ordinary-Time-31A.php>

**Please commend this resource to colleagues - they simply send an email to [churchnewsireland@gmail.com](mailto:churchnewsireland@gmail.com) with the message 'Passwords' in the title**