

The Bible has a word for when our outsides don't match our insides: **Hypocrisy.**

The word hypocrisy derives from the ancient Greek word *hypokrisis*, which literally translates to "acting on a stage" or "play-acting" but already when the gospels and the epistles were written, this word also applied to daily life in a negative way. Already then it referred to someone who "wears a mask" of assumed virtues or beliefs that they do not actually possess.

The Bible has a word for when the outsides DO match our insides: **Integrity.**

Integrity comes from the same root as "integer"—something whole, undivided, complete. When we look at the scripture today we are asked to place ourselves as the hearer – or the one for whom the text is written and we are called to ask ourselves, is our outward behaviour a reflection of our inward heart? Does our outward action tell the truth about what is happening in our heart?

Barb Read for you from Psalm 50:7-15. In this psalm God is portrayed as the judge, Heaven and earth are witnesses, and God's own people are on trial. Surprisingly, the problem isn't that they aren't worshipping – no – they are meeting all the requirements set out for a worshipping/honoring God people. They are performing the requisite rituals, religious obligations and sacrifices.

But their sacrifice has become an outward performance only. Showing your neighbour that you're bringing the right sacrifices becomes more important than bringing what you can because you want to honour God. Performing the right rituals to perfection has become more important than doing the ritual because you want to praise God.

Since when is it more important to "one up" your neighbour than it is to praise God with integrity? Similarly, just doing the right stuff in order to please God is just a surface level praise. In this psalm, God reminds the people, "Every wild animal of the forest is mine." In other words: "I don't need your perfumatory sacrifices." "I can get whatever animal I like"

What God desires is gratitude, trust, and relationship. Isn't this true for right here right now too. We don't sacrifice animals anymore – but we still do rituals for appearance sakes.

We can show up at church, join all the committees, sing all the songs, play all the instruments, say all the prayers, preach all the sermons and teach all the Sunday schools and even give the largest amount of money and still do it all for the wrong reasons.

It may look pretty from the outside – but the inside is, to quote Jesus from his criticism of the pharisees – the inside of a white washed tomb.

We've met people like this. They say that they are one way – and yet something doesn't align – the outsides look nice, but the insides don't match. Of course, it is never this easy or black and white. We are all hypocrites – all of us are masking...and hopefully all of us are working within the grace of God towards wholeness, shalom, and integrity. But how willing are we to actually to stick around and do the hard work of dismantling this?

Doing the hard work means owning the truth about ourselves. David and Josiah and many others owned the truth about themselves. In our New Testament scripture today, we read that Matthew, too, knew the truth about himself.

When Jesus found him, he was sitting at a tax booth. At the time, tax collectors represented everything that was not Godly...namely fraud, greed, betrayal of values and cooperation with Rome.

Matthew could not hide behind a reputation for righteousness. His hypocrisy was out in the open for all to see and yet when Jesus looked at him and said, "Follow me" Matthew didn't argue or pretend he was someone else. He didn't stick his nose up in arrogance. No. He simply got up and left the taxes and followed Jesus. He repented. He put away the old way. He was forgiven. He spent the rest of his life learning from the master, proclaiming the good news and, according to tradition, compiling the Gospel of Matthew.

Later at a feast in the house many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

<sup>12</sup> But when he [Jesus] heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. <sup>13</sup> Go and learn what this means, I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."

Right here in this story of the beginning of Matthew's discipleship journey Jesus reminds the disciples, the pharisees and the sinners and tax collectors around him that the hard work of dismantling our "white washed tombs" is the very beginning of discipleship. Dare we even say it is the daily act of discipleship.

Discipleship begins when we stop managing our appearance and start telling the truth. The truth about our fears, our failures, our wounds, and our wounding. When we let God in, really in, admit our sins, and repent, only then can we experience true grace. Only then will our sacrifice – whatever it is – be right before God.

Jesus never had trouble with sinners. Jesus had trouble with people who couldn't admit they were sinners.

In the gospels, these people were the ones who – on the surface had it all together. They performed the rites, they sacrificed the proper stuff and they knew the law inside out. When Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners, the Pharisees objected because they were concerned that Jesus wasn't doing the whole ritual, sacrifice, cleanliness rite stuff the right way. They were concerned that Jesus was teaching the "sinners" bad theology. Instead of outward ritual cleanliness, Jesus was focused on the inward cleanliness. Part of inward cleanliness meant coming to terms with one's own NEED FOR inward cleanliness. Jesus rebuffed them with scripture – quoting Hosea, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice."

Mercy requires honesty. Integrity. The ability to truly see yourself as you are – and offer that to God.

We cannot take a speck out of your neighbour's eye without first taking the plank out of your own eye. We can't reprimand a sinful practice in another person if you don't deal with that same practice within yourself first. We cannot reconcile a relationship if you refuse to acknowledge your part in harming the relationship. We cannot experience forgiveness if you insist there is nothing to forgive. And, finally, we can't expect your sacrifices mean anything to God if it is not accompanied by inner work.

We can say all the right things about Jesus and his love for the world, but, as Mennonites, we believe that real faith – real sacrifice is a visible expression of an invisible truth. Real faith is made visible, not through performance, but through mercy, service, empathy and love.

Worship shapes life, words match actions, confessions match conduct. And this faith – this real faith cannot lie sleeping. It clothes the naked, comforts the sorrowful, gives food to the hungry and shelters the destitute.

Integrity is costly. Sometimes telling the truth means that we have to admit that we were wrong. That is hard to do because vulnerability is so often seen as weakness. But admitting we were wrong is the first step in reconciliation, as is apologizing – with a meek heart – surrendering our sin / ways we have hurt ourselves and others – to God and to the one we are apologizing.

Integrity may mean that we change direction – and let go of the notion that we always need to know where we are going. Sometimes it means asking for help. Sometimes it means giving help without judgement (or at least working inwardly with God on the judgement part and trying not to show it/live it),

Let's return to the beginning of the sermon, "Be who you are—and are who you be. Life is so much easier if your outsides match your insides."

This saying holds a deep truth – found throughout the Bible. God is not asking us to be impressive.

No. God is asking us to be truthful about who we are, whose we are, our need for grace, and our own dependence on God. God has made us enough – when we are truthful for our need for God in our lives – then our sacrifice will be enough.

Psalm 50 reminds us that God doesn't need our performances. Matthew reminds us that Jesus calls imperfect people.

Together this teaches us that God is not looking for polished sacrifices but for honest disciples. Literally, God is looking for a group of messy beloveds doing their best and loving hard. The sacrifice God desires is a thankful heart, a truthful life, and a community where mercy matters more than appearances.

So may we have the courage to know, see and tell the truth. To God, to one another, to ourselves.

And may our outsides increasingly match the grace-filled reality that God is creating within us. Amen.