

The Advent and the Parables – 3 The Heart of a Person

1. A month or so ago, I mentioned that I went to observe a martial arts class early in the `1970s. I was fascinated by much of it but quite confused at what looked like a structured dance, punctuated by assorted punches, kicks, and vocalizations made to the air. I later learned this was called a “kata” and was designed to develop muscle memory, making the fighter more efficient when faced with 1 or more attackers.
2. One of our TN counties has developed a new uniform for the sheriff's department. I'm a huge fan of the change – wearing the vest outside of the clothes and making it a load bearing vest...but it is going to take a LOT of training to make sure the deputies reach for the right item in the right place under stress. [Duane Harrison asking if I could strip and reassemble my rifle. No]
3. What does this have to do with the parables and Advent? A lot! We are going to look at one of the most amazing and shocking of all the parables. First, the version out of Mark and then go right to the version in Matthew. [Mark 7:14-23; Matthew 15:10-20]
4. Wow – so much here. The first thing to note is that this sermon, this parable, offended the religious people of the day. They hated it. Why? Because they had thought that the training they had received via the Law of Moses was the be all and end all. They did not realize that it was there to bring them to holiness and ready them for the Messiah. [It would be like coming under attack and doing a kata in front of them, or stripping and reassembling your rifle to impress the enemy].
5. The religious people of the day had invested EVERYTHING they had and everything they were into these laws. They followed them strictly, even tithing seeds! But they didn't understand WHY they tithed. They thought it was all God wanted from them. Jesus corrects that bluntly in a sermon against the religious, smug, self righteous of the day. [Matthew 23:23-24]
6. [Going after a man whose wife called in a panic, finding him in a bar, hearing he was at a hotel with a woman, wife found them...and he waited on the Table two days later. Another man was on full disability

but roofed houses with his son] When we boil down faithfulness to a set of actions we go through on Sunday and a set of “be good, don’t be bad” rules during the week, we are really just followers of Buddha or Confucius who come to church once a week. Our gatherings are supposed to be the overflow of our hearts, not an end to themselves.

7. Many do not see the point of the gathering...and they are the very ones who most need the gathering. Here, it becomes easy to check ourselves: do our lives match the songs we sing (IF we sing)? Are we truly pledged to Jesus and to each other, reconfirming that as we take the bread and wine together? Are we punching a time clock or are we bringing the overflow of our hearts?
8. The songs, prayers, and fellowship here are also here to develop muscle memory for our hearts. We learn to respond in faith, as a part of a faith community. We are concerned about the reputation of God and so we do not shame Him by our treatment of others...or by ignoring others.
9. Another word about the overflow of our hearts. I’ve heard some interesting language followed by “I’m so sorry! That just slipped out.” I get that, I truly do. That said, it can only slip out if it is first in. We cannot keep all of that stuff out there in the world, but when you can get away from it, do so...and then fill your heart with good so THAT will slip out.
10. Men are famous for saying something cruel and harsh to their wives or girlfriends and then saying “I didn’t mean it. I was just angry.” Sorry, that’s completely unacceptable. You spoke from the overflow of your heart and revealed something about yourself. [And she didn’t “make” you do it]
11. [The lady in Inverness when I opened my door, nearly hitting her] This requires retraining. We need to train every bit as hard as an law enforcement officer has to train to know what to say, how to respond, where to reach for what gear without looking. We need to be full of the Spirit, full of the Word. [People don’t commit a crime before they thought about it. It isn’t an accident]

12. God will not judge us when we get some of the externals wrong. He judges us when we get our hearts wrong. [Matthew 15:17-20] Chase Bank likes to ask “What’s in your wallet?” God doesn’t ask “what’s in your heart?” for that becomes obvious when we see what comes out of it. As the old song asks, “Have thine affections been nailed to the cross? Is thy heart right with God?”