

SERMON OCTOBER 25 2020: "FAIR DINKUM!"

Matthew 23:1-12 and 22:34-40



"Fair dinkum!" It's a popular Australian colloquial expression -. But where did it come from?

One theory is that the word "dinkum" was brought to Australia by settlers from the English Midlands. It meant work. "Fair dinkum" became a fair day's work for a fair wage.

Another story is that the Aussie version of "dinkum" was coined on the Australian goldfields from one of the dialects widely spoken by Chinese miners: "Din" and "kum" loosely translate as "true gold". In other words to be fair dinkum is to be the real thing – authentic - genuine.

Being "fair dinkum" is about being honest, straightforward, - someone you can trust. When we say someone is fair dinkum it is about having substance over image and show – the idea of fair dinkum hates hypocrisy. It is about practising what we preach – or "walking the talk". It is about integrity!

In today's remarkable passage from Matthew's Gospel, Jesus warns us against those who are not fair dinkum.

Eugene Peterson's *The Message* paraphrases part of our reading this way: *The religion scholars and Pharisees are competent teachers in God's Law. You won't go wrong in following their teachings on Moses. But be careful about following them. They talk a good line, but they don't live it. They don't take it into their hearts and live it out in their behavior. It's all spit-and-polish veneer.*

Instead of giving you God's Law as food and drink by which you can banquet on God, they package it in bundles of rules, loading you down like pack animals. They seem to take pleasure in watching you stagger under these loads, and wouldn't think of lifting a finger to help. Their lives are perpetual fashion shows...

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Here we see a very strident and focussed Jesus speaking out. And what is he so angry about?

Hypocrisy. We hate it when people say one thing and do another.

It's not always easy - if you are like me sometimes you may have thought "Do as I say not what I do" as you watch your children go off into the world!

Jesus affirms that the Pharisees and scribes are learn-ed in matters of law and faith. They know their stuff. What they say is well worth listening to. After all these are the teachers who stand in the tradition of Moses, who led their ancestors out of slavery in Egypt and received the Ten Commandments -the Law - at Mount Sinai. The scribes and the Pharisees are the leaders who have been responsible for holding their people and their traditions together as the Israelites suffered at the hands of one powerful empire after another.

These are the teachers responsible for helping the people to remember who they are, and whose they are, and how to live lives that are faithful to God. **But the problem**, Jesus says, **is that they are hypocrites** – in other words they are like actors wearing masks on the stage. They are not real.



They hide behind their masks and they are not who they appear to be. They do not practise what they preach. They preen themselves but there is little substance to their characters. They are not fair dinkum.



For example the Pharisees and scribes wear a phylactery which is a black leather box containing parchments of scripture. They strap them onto their left arm or forehead. Its purpose is to keep the wearer faithful as it reminds them constantly of God's teaching. The fringe on their cloaks is a sign of their sacred role in the

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community. But they have turned these rich religious accessories into fashion items and mocked the tradition of Moses for their own glorification.

Jesus exposes the Pharisees who have used their position to grab privilege and status for themselves. They have forgotten that the authority and the honour attached to their role is a Godly calling and that they are answerable to God. They show no humility They have put self-interest first.

And so an angry Jesus exposes them and their hypocrisy. He says they look the part but in what really matters – the attitudes in their hearts and minds – they are phony.

And as you and I reflect upon this, we too are challenged to examine our consciences before God: Do our actions match our words? Are we fair dinkum about being Christian in all that we do and say?

When we wear a cross– or a T-Shirt as I saw a man wearing recently with a cross on the back and the words “Jesus Team” on the front – when we put a Christian fish sign on our car - when ministers and priests wear clerical clothes, do our actions honour God? It makes me incredibly sad when the media show statues of Jesus and crosses whenever they speak about child sexual abuse. The self-interest and hypocrisy and cover-up of some of our church leaders has tainted us all and made many people believe that Christians are not fair dinkum - that our leaders have failed to practise what we preach and dishonoured God.

And Jesus is angry because the religious leaders in his time have failed to be the good carers or shepherds of the people that they should be. He observes how many of the Pharisees have made God’s law into something so impossibly burdensome that it ties ordinary people up and crushes their spirit. Instead of the Law being the way of living for a liberated community of God that it was intended to be – instead of it being food and drink nourishing their souls – the Law has become a heavy yoke around people’s necks making it impossible for them to live faithfully in their everyday lives.

When the poor came looking for spiritual comfort, they have only received even heavier burdens with instructions to try harder - The religious leaders have broken their trust.

Jesus is angry about those leaders who are more intent upon cementing their own power and basking in their own privileged position than helping their people to know who they are and whose they are – God’s beloved people.

Next Saturday is the anniversary of when the great church reformer Martin Luther nailed 95 arguments against the practice in the mediaeval church of selling pardons to people desperate to be saved from their sins.



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Luther argued that the church was plain wrong. It was manipulating and exploiting people's fears - all for money. He himself had suffered greatly. He lived on a tightrope between fear and hope, heaven and hell never confident that his best would be good enough for God.

Jesus and Luther- both reformers in their ways - cut through the hypocrisy and went back to the basics of their religious tradition.

Jesus cut to the heart and the spirit of the Law which is all about love and building a nurturing faith community. 'Love God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind Love your neighbour as yourself'.

Luther rereading Paul's Letter to the Romans discovered the grace of God in Jesus himself when he gave his own life to offer us forgiveness and abundant life in relationship with God.

Friends, Jesus invites us into a community in which there is no self-promotion or popularism or manipulation or serving one's own interests. He offers us an alternative way in our world with all its spin and image building and corruption.

He says that the greatest leader is the servant of all. The greatest leader -knowing that it is not all about himself or herself - puts the well-being of the other – especially the poor, the outsider and those who are vulnerable first. In Jesus' community love is the glue that binds people together.

Jesus Christ himself didn't just criticise those religious leaders who did not care for their people with words but practised what he preached with such integrity that he emptied himself of all his privilege as the Son of God when he lived among us. He spoke out and he lived out the love of God with its compassion and inclusiveness – its hospitality and respect and justice – its diversity and acceptance - and generosity and grace - and he did not back down even though it led to him being arrested and killed on a cross by those he challenged.

Jesus walked the talk even in the face of death. Raised from the dead and overcoming the power of evil, he offers real hope. There are no empty words here. Jesus Christ is the real thing - true gold - fair dinkum. We can put our trust in him.

Let us spend some moments in prayer. I invite you to join me as you can.

Lord Jesus, help me to keep my eyes on you – You have shown us how God loves us with gentle compassion and goodness, and grace: Everything you said you did and more. In you is hope and joy, forgiveness and peace - life in all its fullness and freedom as God intended for us as beloved children. And so in trust I want to give all that I am... ... Please accept it and make it fully your own and lead me into the way of loving God and my neighbour as myself. Amen.

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