

Don't show off...

(Isaiah 58:1-12, Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21)

No one likes a show off! Currently news is swirling about the former Steelers star Antonio Brown... I'm hearing the Oakland Raiders will likely be his new team. For those who know the N.F.L. this makes sense. The Raiders have a long, storied history of being arrogant, confrontational and often lead the league in penalties. Many of their fans dress up in Halloween inspired Goth and proudly sit in a section known as the black hole; a show off will fit right in wearing Silver and Black.

Here's the challenge though... today's text from Matthew's gospel isn't about braggadocios show offs, it's about the devoutly religious. We all know a fraud when we see one (in action). Many politicians or celebrities care a great deal about their public image so they make every effort to be seen reading books to children, serving the homeless at a soup kitchen or holding/kissing babies. If, we're honest about it these kinds of manufactured moments are also a challenge for followers of Jesus.

Jesus says, "when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you..." Now, there's no record to indicate that the Pharisees actually blew a horn in the temple when they gave to the poor however Jesus had a point to make. Any act of charity is undermined by self-righteousness. In saying, "do not let the left hand know what the right hand is doing" Jesus emphasizes humble giving.

How do you approach faithfulness in Christ? Does everyone need to know what you're giving up for Lent? Does social media really care about whether or not you eat sweets or meat for the next forty days?

The season of Lent arrives clothed in purple. As I've often reminded the kids purple means preparation. During this season we prepare for the coming of a resurrected Savior, but first, we admit our need. This evening's service is not about receiving a special blessing, a temporary tattoo or a mark of merit... but the reminder that you're nothing special at all. We don't like hearing that message.

We may wince when superstar athletes act "the fool" but were they our family would we say anything other than, "you're the man"? From the time we're born we hear "You are loved, you are unique you are my pride and joy". Yet, as we age we realize something, we're not the only loved, talented and prayed for person... even within our family. We can sing well but so can someone else, we can run fast but so can someone else, we may be talented but we're not really that unique.

In the United States there are over 325 million people, over twelve million in Pennsylvania alone. But we're nothing in comparison to the 1.3 Billion in India or China. Simply put, we have nothing to show off about, tonight, we're even just a small percentage of people who call this their church home. Though this message probably feels utterly uncommon; we are but dust, and to dust we shall return. Jesus tells us to pray in the solitude of our homes, even in an inner room within our home, in secret. Likewise, when we fast we're not to draw extra attention to ourselves. All spiritual disciplines are to be matters of the heart not made for public approval. Our faithfulness is not indicated by how much we can gain in contract negotiations but in silent, selfless service to our God and King.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,

Amen.