

Jesu Juva

“Double Lives”

Text: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21; Joel 2:12-19; 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Hi, I'm Pastor Douthwaite, and I lead a double life. I suspect you do too.

Because there's the outward part of my life, the part people see. And then there's the inward, the part you can't see. Sometimes they're on the same page, in agreement. But often times they're not. Probably more often, if I could see as God sees. In fact, the two are often as different as night and day.

So on the outside, you see a good work. You don't see how grudgingly it's done. You see a smile. You don't know the pain.

You see dedication. You're not aware of the indignation at having to do what someone else should have done.

You see a teacher. You don't know the reluctant, stubborn student.

You hear good words. You don't hear the grumbling of my heart.

You see hands that help. You don't perceive the bitterness brewing deep down.

You see generosity. You don't realize the covetous desires.

You see a well-dressed, clean-cut, fellow. You don't fathom the ugliness, the darkness, the cesspool of sin in my heart.

You see what I want you to see. I hide the rest.

You too? You too.

Is that not what Jesus was talking about, when He said *beware*? He's speaking to us who lead a double life. That it's not only not good to do so, but dangerous. No, I may not be sounding the trumpet when I give to the needy, I may not be on the street corners praying, and I may not disfigure my face while fasting . . . but am I not doing the same thing? Am I not as bad? A hypocrite, as Jesus calls them. Me. You too? You too.

Beware. Don't be fooled. You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, and maybe you're so good you can fool all the people all the time, including yourself - but the Word today is: *you can't fool God*. Ever. Your Father sees what is in secret and rewards accordingly. Which isn't good news for me.

But we're not alone, and this is nothing new. The people in the prophet Joel's day were doing it too. And so the Lord said to them: **rend your hearts and not your garments**. Enough of the hypocrisy. Enough of the outward show. Tear open your heart, that filthy, horrible, sin-infected heart. Why? To **return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious**

and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. Because God doesn't want the disaster for you, the danger for you. He wants to clean out your heart with His mercy and love and gracious forgiveness. All hearts, in fact. All the people, the congregation, the elders, the children, the nursing infants, the brides and bridegrooms, He says through Joel.

So that's why we're here tonight. To return. To repent. That's why Ash Wednesday. That's why Lent. Not only these times, but especially these times.

And the ashes on our foreheads? Oh, we can be hypocritical about them too, if we wear and receive them as a show. But really, that's my outward beginning to look like my inward. But only beginning, because my inward's a lot worse than just a little smudge. You too? You too.

But there is One for whom this wasn't true. One whose inward perfectly matched His outward. One who did not lead a double life and was no hypocrite. And we heard what happened to Him. God *made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* So on the cross, on Jesus, there's your sin, there's the danger, there's the curse, there's what you deserve, there is your Father seeing in secret and repaying openly. But it's on Jesus and not on you! That's why Christmas. That's why Good Friday. So that in Him, in His taking our place, our hearts may be made right again with God.

*Renew me, O eternal Light, and let my heart and soul be bright,
Illumined with the light of grace That issues from Your holy face* (LSB #704 v. 1).

That grace issues from His holy face for He does not turn away from us in anger and indignation, but turns to us in the face of His Son, who came for us and for our salvation, and who comes now for the same - His water washing us, His Word forgiving us, His food feeding us. That we be right with God. That our outward match our inward - not in blackness, but in cleanness; not in filth, but in holiness.

But actually, it's much more than that - our outward matching our inward. It is God joining together again what sin has rent asunder. For earlier we heard those horrible words, first spoken to Adam after his fall into sin: *Dust you are, and to dust you shall return* (Genesis 3:19). What that means is that sin causes things to fall apart, come apart at the seams. And so man, created to live and not die, *will* die. Our inward and outward have come apart. Our bodies will fall apart at the seams and become dust. Our world is falling apart, coming apart at the seams. Relationships fall apart. Everything is coming apart.

But in Christ, everything is brought back together again. The dust into which we'll turn will be reunited into our bodies again in the resurrection. And even more, we will be

reunited into that perfect fellowship with God that was the reality in the beginning, that we were created for. That has begun already now with the cleansing of our hearts in forgiveness and our adoption as sons and daughters of God in Jesus.

So on this day when we recognize the reality and seriousness of our sin, this first day of Lent, we also look forward to the last day of Lent, when our Lord says from the cross, *It is finished* (John 19:30), and the joy of Easter begins. The joy which will reach its fulfillment on the Last Day, when our Lord returns in glory. The day of the final Easter, which will never end.

Until that day we discipline our bodies. Until that day we strive and wrestle with our doubles lives. Until that day we repent and receive our true treasure - the Body and Blood of Jesus. The Body and Blood born for you, died for you, risen for you, given to you, and returning for you. Beware of everything else, for only in Him your hope and your life.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.