

BEWARE:
February 22, 2023

When one of the girls... **[1 Peace Out]**
For those of you who don't know...
Janet and I have 5 daughters...
I expected more sympathy.

When one of the girls...
Would get in a car...
To leave our home.
Janet and I... would stand on the front stoop...
Waving to them the whole way...

And Janet would say...
Be careful...
And text us...
When you get there.

I would say...
Drive fast...
Take chances.

Clearly... Janet is the better parent.
Because she cautions them...
To be alert...
To be careful...
To beware.

Now... When we see the word BEWARE -

It immediately...
Signals us...
That there is some kind of potential or imminent danger...
Something that could happen...
That has the ability...
To cause us harm.

So if I hit a baseball... **[2 Dog]**
Into the neighbor's yard...
And when I go to fetch it...
I see a sign...
Posted on their fence...
With the friendly advice...
BEWARE OF DOG.

I need to think twice...
About crossing over that fence...
And getting into somebody else's yard.

It is a warning...
That the big teeth of that canine...
May be hazardous...

To the tenderness...
Of my posterior.

Consider yourself warned.

Then there's the Latin phrase... **[3 Buyer Beware]**
Caveat Emptor... which means buyer beware.
You know... we have to take responsibility...
For the choices we make...
And the businesses we support.
We need to be wise...

If not... we MIGHT get fooled...
Or scammed...
Or taken advantage of...
When we buy something...
There is an inherent risk...
In the business of business...

So... buyer... beware.

And of course... there are natural environmental dangers...
Lurking in every nook and cranny... especially in Colorado...
Just waiting to pounce...

Beware... **[4 Cliff]**
When you are near a cliff... **[5 Thin Ice]**
Beware... of the thin ice... **[6 Big Animals]**
Beware of large animals.

Oh... and since dogs...
Have had some sermon time today...
This is for you cat people. **[7 Cat]**

Again... you have been warned.

My point is... **[8 BEWARE]**
When we see the word BEWARE...
In big bold letters...
In front of our faces.

We need stop...
And take a quick inventory...
Of our entire existence...

And ask ourselves...
What exactly am I doing...
And does the benefit...
Outweigh the risk.

So when Jesus starts this section of scripture...
With the big bold word... BEWARE...
That should immediately get our attention.

Because he's trying to tell us something...
That has great potential to do us harm...
Or expose us to imminent spiritual danger.

He lists out... specific particular spirituals practices. **[9 You and God]**

Beware of practicing your piety... your holiness...
Your goodness... before others...
In order to be seen...
Just look at what a good person I am.

Don't give alms... that is financial gifts for people in need...
And sound a trumpet while you're doing it...
To get everyone's attention...

Hey look everybody...
I'm donating some money...
On a GO FUND ME page...
You can see my name right there...
And the amount I've given.

Don't pray out loud and proud on the street corners...
In order to be seen and heard...
By other people...
To get their praise and approval...
For your clever use of the language...
Oh man... you really know how to pray.

And don't look miserable when you fast...
Or practice a personal spiritual discipline...
Don't look pathetic...
So people know what you're doing...
And ask... oh... are you ok?
You look like you're suffering.
For your faith.

In all four cases...
Jesus says... if we do these things...
We have already received our rewards.

The sympathy.
The good reputation.
The sense of pride...
The public approval.

Those are the earthly rewards.

But these are not earthly practices.
So why would we use them for earthly reward?

These are spiritual disciplines.
These are practices we do...
Because... wait...

Why? Why do we do these things?

I think that's exactly what Jesus is asking us...
In this gospel lesson today.

He is asking us...
Why do you do these things?
Why do you pray... or fast... or give financial gifts...
Why do you do good works?

He is asking us to stop and think...
About why we do...
What we do...

And how our actions...
Are connected to our faith relationship...
With God.

In the lesson...
He calls us to do those things...
Those spiritual disciplines...
In the privacy of our own hearts...
And in the privacy of our own homes...

He asks us...
To consider...
Why we do these things...
And why do we care.

It's a question of MOTIVATION. **[10 Motivation]**

Do we do good works...
Works of love...
Works of kindness...
Works of grace...

So that we will look good to other people?
So they will say...
You know that Rod Hank...
He is such a good guy...
Just look at the way...
He... whatever...

Or is it... so we don't get in trouble with God?

The logic being...
If God has commanded these things...
Then this is the way...

If I don't do these things...
God is going to be mad at me.
And then... my whole salvation...
Is at serious risk.

Do we do these things...
These good acts...
Because we are martyrs...

We say in our hearts...
If I don't do it...
Who will???
God is depending on me.

Do we do these things...
To make the world a better place...

If this is our motivation...
I think it would be wise for us...
To study world history...
A little bit more.
And understand...
The world in which we live...
And how things have not really changed.

OR... do I do these things...
To get some kind of reward.

If I practice piety...
If I do acts of charity.
If I pray in public.
If I fast and practice spiritual discipline...

Then surely...
I will get a reward.
I will get EXACTLY what I deserve.

But Dear Christian friends...
That is EXACTLY the point of Ash Wednesday.
What do we deserve?
What are we entitled to?
Who are we... as we stand here today before God...

I'm afraid we won't like the answer...
To those questions.
So instead... let's just beware.

Let's join together...
And bring our impure MOTIVATIONS...
Our need of being...
Strong.
Important.
Giving.
Kind.
Awesome.
Wonderful.
Honest.
Lovely.

Let's take all those motivations...
And know in our hearts...
That is not who we are... most the time.

That we all have fallen short.
As much as we might want to be good... and holy... and right...
In and of ourselves.

We're just not doing it...
And when we do the right thing...
Often it's for the wrong reason.

So... if reward is the reason...
If looking good is the reason...
If being holy is the reason...
If impressing other people...
Is the reason...
That we do good...
In this world...

Then...
We have missed the boat...
And don't even know...
We missed the boat.

But the good news for today...
our salvation is not up to us.

We have tried impress God...
By impressing other people.
By being good.
By being awesome.

And it does not work.

There is only one way...
To be reconciled to God.

Just stop. Stop it.
Stop pretending.
Stop acting.
Stop right where we are.
Right this very minute.

And return to the Lord our God.
With all our heart.
With fasting.
With weeping.
With mourning.
Rene our hearts...

And return the Lord you God.
Because God is gracious...
And God is merciful.

God is slow to anger.
And God is abounding in steadfast love.

Or like the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians... **[11 Commend]**

Be reconciled to God.
For our sake...
God made him to be sin...
Who knew no sin.

Jesus took on our sin.
To reconcile us.
So we are free...
WE ARE FREE...
To serve God... in and through God's grace.

And in serving God...
We don't care what anyone else thinks.

In all humility... before the Lord...
We commend ourselves... to God...
In every way.

No matter what happens...
We serve our God.
That's our motivation.
To serve God...
With our lives.
At all times.

Through great endurance.
In affliction.
Hardships.
Calamities.
Beatings.
Imprisonments...

Riots.
Labors.
Sleepless nights.
Hunger.

By purity.
Knowledge.
Patience.
Kindness.
Holiness of spirit.
Genuine love.
Truthful speech.

In honor and dishonor.
In ill repute and good repute.

See... in everything.

We serve our God...
And commend our lives...
Our whole existence...
To our God.

So... nothing else matters.

If we're expecting a reward...
We ought not to look here... on earth.

We have already received our reward...
In and through Christ.

If we think we deserve something more...
There is nothing more...
Than what God has already given us.

If we want to impress other people...
Well... good luck with that.
Impressing people...
Is a fool's game...
With a big stop at the end. **[12 Humble]**

Just come to the Lord.
Just give it up.

Just know... you are already important... to God...
God loves you.
And wants you...
To come back.

And to commend...
Everything you do...
To the Lord your God...

And to know...
In the very fiber of your being...

You have already received your reward...
Everything God has... belongs to you...
Child of God... through your brother... Jesus.

So. You are free. Today.
To confess your need.
To serve your God.
To commend your whole life to God.

AND to humble yourself...
In the sight of the Lord...

I will too.

Let us pray.

Lord God.
I know who I am.
And I know who you are.

I don't deserve this.
Any of this...

But thank you God.
For everything.
In Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.