

“Roll Reversal”

Matthew 23:1-12

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Matthew 23:1-12

¹Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ²"The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; ³therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. ⁴They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. ⁵They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. ⁶They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, ⁷and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have people call them rabbi. ⁸But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. ⁹And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father—the one in heaven. ¹⁰Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah. ¹¹The greatest among you will be your servant. ¹²All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.

Prayer.

Everyone loves to kick a hypocrite;
to laugh out loud
at doctors who smoke
at nurses who are rude
at nuns who are nasty
at preachers who are fallen
at teachers who flunk
at politicians who betray the public's trust
and are hauled away in handcuffs.

A deflating ego
is quite a sight,
a spectacle
certain to draw a crowd.
Sweet, little Rosa¹
pulled the plug on the ego
of racist America
simply by refusing to move to the back of the
bus.
“You go gal!”

A deflating ego
is quite a sight,

a spectacle
certain to draw a crowd.
Tis the season for elections
when politicians hungry for
status and power
ply the campaign trail
placating the voters
with hallow claims
for humble, public service.
“Oh, shut-up” Leno amuses.
Voters should never be so naive
to believe the lie
that the motive is pure public service
when power, position, and title
are so aggressively sought.

A deflating ego
is quite a sight,
a spectacle
certain to draw a crowd.
A preacher de-frocked
A bishop de-commissioned,
errors of ethics
misplaced morality
chargeable offenses and involuntary leave-

Bring it on baby,
and bring the local news crews with you!
“The bigger they are
the harder they fall”
we muse with giddy delight.

“Your honor” we elevate, even as we stand
and bow before the magistrate.

“The Honorable” we lift up our glass to toast
the mayor
who graces our gathering
with their presence
and a request for a donation.

“Doctor” we confer upon the one
wearing the white lab coat
even as they call each of us
by our first name
to keep us in our place
and not notice that we've been waiting
for the past 2 hours
in the waiting room
“Excuse me, doctor. You may call me
'mister'.”

“Reverend” we elevate our clergy
(though, just between
you and me
I've never felt very
“reverend”
– never - in my life!).

“Professor” we proclaim
“Dean” we declare
as they enter the room
and we submit without question.
Oh, we love our titles
our status and our admiration,
yes we do.

Everyone loves to kick a hypocrite;
until
some prickly preacher
reminds us that
“it takes one
to know one.”

It is humbling to
have cold water splashed in the face,
to realize that we all have feet of clay.
We all may talk the talk
but every one of us
keep one foot
or finger
in the cookie jar of sin.

Jesus looked at the Pharisees
and laughed.
Would you take a look at that?!
Large, ornate boxes
strapped to forehead and arm,
holding scraps of paper
snippets of scripture
as if it would do any good
from inside
a closed box.
Get a load of that!
A prayer shawl on every man
with long tassels on each corner
to add a knot with each of the
repetitive prayers.
Ancient cycloptic geeks
heads covered with knotted shawls
each trying to outdo the other.
Familiarity by assimilation
prevented them from seeing
how truly clown like
and foolish
each had become.

The visual was only the welcome mat
before their home of hypocrisy.
Power came
by way of
titles unearned
- Rabbi – Teacher - Father -
by way of
burden encumbered
by way of
taxes levied.
No help, no empathy, no feeling
No concern
other than to ensure
personal comfort,

personal status,
personal preference.

“Who's your daddy?”
Jesus mocked the elite.
Our Father
is our God
who art in Heaven.
Our Teacher
is our God
incarnate before our eyes.
No hypocrite here.
No hypocrite kicking a hypocrite
with blood sport
like you or I.
No violence in found
no hint of hitting
hurting or fighting back
like you or I.
Neither is there self elevation
no pride
no predijust.

It is so like the Savior
we've come to know
from a lifetime
of faithful attendance.
It is so like our Savior
to turn the tables
reverse the rolls.
It is so like our Savior
to evoke the memory
of beatitude and blessings
calling us to return
to the core of our beliefs.

The greatest
will become the servants.
And the humble
will be exalted.

This news is revolutionary
to the self promoting
big egos of our world
to those who have the most to loose.
This news is treasonous
to the self-proclaimed righteous

to those whose attitude is above
the commoner
to those with the most to loose.

Likewise, this news is welcome
to the billions of serfs and slaves
who have given their lives
in faithful discipleship
to our Savior.
This news is celebrated
by the billions of lost, least,
the tread upon of the world
who until Christ
had no hope, no light, no future to anticipate.

When Christ calls us to
roll reversal
where do we find ourselves?
Are we shamed into servitude?
Embarrassed from a lifetime of pride?
Broken down by privilege, status and rank?
Or, do we
find ourselves
tossed into the light of day?
Elevated above the fray
Thrust into the hope of
Christ
and His Salvation?

It is a gift to be humble.
Be assured
that an even greater gift awaits
one day
when rolls will be reversed.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. Amen.

i In tribute to Rosa Parks, who died this past week (10/25/05).