True Authenticity. November 7 2021 Mark 12:38-44

As a child I used to like the television program, “Bewitched”. If I see an episode now many things strike me, but one of them is how much advertising has changed over those decades. Darrin was constantly coming up with images and slogans that were witty and grabbed people’s attention. However, unlike today, the use of the product and its claims were normally modest and appropriate. Today in a world of “Spin doctors” “fake news” and the decline in respect for objective truth, an initial and strong attitude of scepticism seems to usually be the wisest response to advertising of any kind. Authenticity can be hard to find.

The scribes of Jesus day were venerated with unlimited respect and awe from the people. They wore long white robes with a long fringe on them, this was the colour and style of clothing which marked out people of distinction in the community. They were refereed to with titles such as *‘Father’, ‘Master’, and ‘Rabbi’* and everyone in the market place (except tradesmen at work) would rise in deference to them when they passed by and their statements were seen as possessing sovereign authority. The influential members of the society would seek to have a Scribe and his students join in their special celebrations to add to the distinguished nature of the event. The seat of Honour in the Synagogue was reserved for the Scribe.[[1]](#footnote-1) These were powerful people, yet throughout Mark’s gospel we often see them in disputes with Jesus. These were respected people but Jesus challenges their authenticity.

This story is set in the Temple precinct and Jesus is speaking to the people. Jesus words regarding the Scribes in this narrative point to their relishing the adulation they receive, and even craving it. They were in peril of idolising their own status and failing to acknowledge that God alone was worthy of worship and awe.

Jesus goes on to accuse them of exploiting the poor, specifically the widows. The Scribes in Jerusalem appear to have been in the poorer class economically and extending hospitality to them, as an act of piety was encouraged. Many of the wealthier believers supported them in this way. The scandal in Jesus words lays in the Scribes abusing their position of power and exploiting the hospitality of the poor. They were called to be advocates for the needy in the community. However they had been using their position and power for their own advantage, not for the benefit of the community. Finally they are rebuked for using their public prayers to win the esteem of other people. They had moved away from the centrality of the honour of God and were using external practices of their faith for their own advancement in the eyes of their community.[[2]](#footnote-2)

These scribes were:

Addicted to the deference they received

Corrupted by the privileges they enjoyed even to the point of exploiting the vulnerable

Perverting the practices of their faith to enhance their own reputation.

These people seemed to be driven by a desire to be highly esteemed by other people.

The opinions of others can have a powerful effect upon us. It is the main reason that such efforts are made to enable children and young people to be able to resist and re-evaluate the peer pressure they experience.

Popularity and success can be sadly addictive. We see the raw consequences, in the often miserable lives of celebrities whose careers have taken a downward slide.

In John’s gospel we read of some people who chose to follow Jesus but who were concerned that they might be put out of the synagogue for this choice. Therefore, it says that they did not publicly acknowledge that they had become followers of Jesus because *“They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.”[[3]](#footnote-3)*

These scribes seem to be motivated by a similar obsession with their reputation in the eyes of other people.

When Samuel was called by God to commission a new King he was tempted to look at the natural attributes of the young men before him, to look at their outward appearance, however God spoke to him to correct his perspective. God said, *“[people] look on the outward appearance but the Lord looks on the heart”[[4]](#footnote-4)*

This passage as a whole, speaks strongly of authenticity, using both negative and positive examples. The contrast between the widow and the scribes, is focused on the authenticity of their devotion to God directing their actions. It contrasts the sham righteousness of the Scribes with the widow’s wholehearted devotion to God.[[5]](#footnote-5) The widow gives all that she has, her focus is on worshipping God through offering everything to God.

We can easily portray an outward facade which is incongruent with that which is happening in the core of our beings.

God sees through our facades. God offers us both loving acceptance and profound transformation, that our lives may be lived to their full potential and that our authenticity may point others to Jesus.

In a world plagued by unreliability, lack of integrity and often overt deception, our communities crave authenticity and our faith demands it.

So it may be valuable for us to consider:

*What masks do we wear? How authentic is the life others see?*

*In what ways are we too concerned about the opinions of other people? In what ways are we expressing our devotion to God through our actions?*

*In what ways may we be complicit in exploiting the needy, even if only by our inactivity?*

*The story of this widow is always a prompt to consider our attitude to our financial resources. To consider our level of generosity, to consider our willingness to give all to God, and to trust that God will guide us in using that which we have honourably. It provides an opportunity to consider if there are things which we are seeking to hold back from God.*

1. William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark: The New International Commentary,* (Garnd Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1974) 439-440. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark: The New International Commentary,* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1974) 440-441. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. John 12:43 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 1 Samuel 16:7 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark: The New International Commentary,* (Garnd Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1974) 442 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)