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“Whoever exalts himself will be humbled” (Matthew 23:12).

Isa 1:10, 16-20; Matt 23:1-12

The Shaker hymn “Simple Gifts,” offers this counsel: ‘Tis the gift to be simple, ‘tis the gift to be free, ‘tis the gift to come down where we ought to be....” Like the hymn, Jesus’ lesson to his disciples about humility was both a warning and a promise that peace and joy comes with knowing our true place. Posturing to be greater than we are is an exhausting and, in the end, futile flight from reality.

He illustrates this with a withering takedown of the scribes and Pharisees, whose hypocrisy has trapped them in shameful contradictions. They do not practice what they preach. They burden others and do nothing to help them. They are all appearance and no substance. They want status and titles that belong to God and to the Christ. For their pride they will be cast down, while those who humble themselves will be lifted up.

Humility is not about denying our abilities; it is about being grounded in truth. The humble person is founded on facts and open to learning and growing instead of claiming to have all the answers. As the hymn says, “To bow and to bend we shan’t be ashamed.”

The essential problem with pretending to be someone you are not is that you will eventually be found out. Like all lies, the only way to sustain the sham reality you are projecting is to tell more lies, to weave a web of deception until it entangles you in your own alternate reality. Pity the person who believes his own delusions even

when they come crashing down.

The crowds faulted their own experts while praising Jesus for possessing authority. The word authentic means connected to the source, the author of things. Jesus was credible because people heard God speaking through him. He was real. The Word of God comes to us as authoritative and therefore trustworthy. Our journey through Lent with Jesus is our time to shed falsehood and pretense, masks and game-playing.

How much lighter we will travel without a trunk full of costumes and scripts to don before different audiences to gain their approval and applause. Jesus says, "Come follow me... and be sure to come as you are, for you are the one I want, the one I love."

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