

We have been reading through Matthew over the past several weeks here at Allison Creek and today we move into the 23rd chapter. In the last couple of weeks, we have been hearing Jesus offering lots of challenges to the religious leaders.

Last week we heard some of the religious and political leaders try to trap Jesus in a question about taxes. Today we will hear Jesus challenge them about how they conduct themselves and treat one another.

This week we are dealing with news of another act of violence. This time it is New York City. But we know we do not need to look to the national news to see acts of violence. We only need to look closely to our communities here in our area.

If we spend our time focused on these acts of violence it can lead us into places of sadness and distrust of humanity. With this in our minds we turn now to the Scripture in front of us.

Read Matthew 23:1-12

Today I am going to invite us to recall those people in our lives who simply live out these words of Jesus. Those people in our lives that don't make a big show of how they live out their faith. They don't draw attention to themselves. The people we know who simply live as servants in a world where they are surrounded by too many people trying to be grandiose and self-serving.

Michael Leach writes about encountering some of these modern-day servants in his life. Michael's wife Vickie suffers from Alzheimer's and spends her days in an adult day care facility. He blogs about how some simple acts make his day go a little bit smoother. He recently wrote this on his blog:

"I pick up Vickie, my wife, from adult day care and drive to Chipotle for takeout. We park in the handicapped space in front. A young man in an apron rushes out the door and holds it open for us. "Mister, I want to show you something," he says. "I have a son!"

"That's wonderful, Andre!" Andre escorts us to the counter and runs to the back for his cellphone.

Molly with the smiling blue eyes stands over the food. "Let me guess," she says. "White rice, pinto beans, chicken, just a little hot sauce on both?"

"I'm proud of you, Molly. Your mom must be very proud."

"Jeter," as in Derek Jeter (that's what I call him because he's a Yankee fan) is at the cash register. We talk about the World Series. Molly passes over the bag and I hand him a 20. "No charge," Jeter says.

The manager, Justin, who knows every customer, started comping us about six months ago. Not every time or even a lot of times but enough times to make me wonder if my old man pants (baggy blue with a drawstring) and the same old Cubs T-shirt makes me look rundown. Jeter says it's policy not to charge good customers every now and then.

And it's not just Chipotle's people who are kind to us.

Abdul at Boston Chicken sometimes gives us two platters of turkey for the price of one and always slips a free slice of apple pie in the bag. Michael, the manager of Bull's Head Diner in Stamford, likes to stuff a free brownie, the size of a brick, into our bag.

Gabriel the archangel, a waiter who has been at the diner since we started going there 20 years ago, carries our bag to the car and opens the door for Vickie and always asks about our grandkids, and we ask him about his family. His mother in Mexico has made it through the earthquake, you'll be happy to know.

The Dalai Lama once counseled followers to be kind whenever and however possible. "And it is always possible," he added.

We pull into our driveway. A white plastic bag hangs on the doorknob. Fresh tomatoes, big ones, little ones, some as red as the Chipotle logo, others yellow as custard. No note. Just the tomatoes. Sometimes I think people are conspiring to feed us.

I suspect the Tomato Fairy is Terry Kutzen, one of Vickie's golfing pals from the old days, who stays in touch. Whenever it's suppertime and I don't know what to get, Terry calls up out of the blue and says, "I just made meat loaf and got plenty left. It's hot and ready to go. Can I come over?"

If it's not her meat loaf, it's her chicken with herbs and spices from the Far East or plastic containers of magical chicken soup that could cure lower back pain, and it's always enough for three full meals.

The Tomato Fairy also could have been Darlene from around the corner, whose husband also had Alzheimer's like Vickie, and died three years ago. Darlene bakes more varieties of cookies than Famous Amos.

Or maybe it's Helen from down the block, who every now and then appears bearing cellophane-wrapped platters with a three-course gourmet meal or, better yet, a paper plate overflowing with lip-burning chocolate chippers just out of the oven.

Yes, it's a big, bad world out there, but after every earthquake, we watch men and women clawing through rocks to save children; for every hurricane, we see neighbors helping neighbors and strangers in other lands sending cans of food; and for every Las Vegas or (New York City), we behold people standing in line at hospitals to donate precious blood.

And for every klutz like me who cares for a Vickie and can only cook Campbell's soup, there are always, always Tomato Fairies.”

Today we are invited to recall and be thankful for the people in our lives who understand what Jesus means when he says, “all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Today we all are invited to follow the words of Jesus and be the ones focused on serving rather than being served. AMEN.

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-Leach, Michael, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/i-know-there-will-always-be-kindness>

-Given: November 5, 2017 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)