

## CAN YOU SAY PHYLACTERIES? (MT 23:1-12)

Sermon given by the Rev. Corinne Hodges  
Sunday, Nov. 2, 2008, St. John of the Cross

- I. Can you say phylacteries? “Fill-act-er-ies”
  - A. It’s a big word, perfect for spelling bee
    1. Meaning?
      - a. Small leather boxes that held scripture quotations
      - b. Tied to forehead or left forearm during prayer
      - c. Worn by observant Jews, esp. Orthodox Jews in Matthew’s time
      - d. Like the tassels, worn as reminder to obey commandments
      - e. “Mindfulness”
- II. A.J. Jacobs “The Year of Living Biblically”
  - A. Humorous book by NY journalist
    - a. Quest to live the ultimate biblical life, follow every single rule of Bible as literally as possible
    - b. Ten Commandments, love thy neighbor, be fruitful and multiply
    - c. But also do not shave beard, wear phylacteries and fringes—kind of like those, along with wearing white clothing
    - d. Discovers some rules are:
      1. Wise and life enhancing: Keep the Sabbath
      2. Baffling: Not wear clothing of mixed fibers
      3. Rules that he could keep for whole yr: You shall not eat eagle, vultures, black vultures, ravens, horned or screech owl or any kind of hawk
    - e. Rules that are difficult to follow and rules that he breaks once a day...you get the idea
    - f. End of book, purpose of the rules—Wearing tassels and phylacteries may get others attention, but do they get you closer to God?
- III. Pharisees and scribes in Gospel follow the rules, but for wrong reasons
  - A. Prideful faith is worn on the outside, but inside their hearts are cold, unloving
    1. Widen phylacteries, lengthen fringes for show
    2. Do not move a finger to help others
    3. Inflict rules on others that become heavy burdens, weighing them down in their lives
  - B. Place of honor, front of the synagogue
  - C. Hung up on titles; they like to be called “rabbi”
  - D. Yet Jesus tells disciples and crowd there is only one rabbi, Jesus

- IV. Past week, again twice the subject came up of what title to call me
  - A. In July, even bishop asked
    - 1. Mother, Reverend, Pastor
    - 2. Baptized name is Corinne
    - 3. Use what is most comfortable for you
    - 4. But this week parishioner said, “I like Sister.”
  
- V. Paul’s reading from 1 Thes., “brothers and sisters”
  - A. The word “family”:
    - 1. Can be taken literally as in
      - a. Blood relatives
      - b. People we share a house with
    - 2. God’s idea of “family” is something very different
  
  - B. Do something unconventional here:
    - 1. Turn around, a full 360, and look at people around you
    - 2. You know some, may not know others
    - 3. All are your brothers and sisters in Christ
    - 4. In God’s house, we are all part of one big, holy family
    - 5. As we say later in baptism part of service, we are all part of the household of God
  
- VI. The children we are baptizing today are learning a new definition of family and brother and sister—the beginning to get the picture that they are now becoming part of this church family and the larger Christian family
  - A. But this broader and more inclusive vision of family is one we all need to be reminded of as well
  - B. And this understanding is not just one we are to talk about
  - C. It’s not like the phylacteries that remain outside ourselves
  - D. This belief that we are one holy family, all brothers and sisters in Christ, is to be taken in and lived out in our daily lives
  - E. May we welcome God’s family members, old and new alike, into the household of God, the one in which we all share