

## Mark 12: 38-40

38 As Jesus taught, he said, 'Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the market-places,<sup>39</sup> and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honour at banquets!<sup>40</sup> They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.'

**Meditation:** Who are the Scribes? Clearly, Jesus and the early church ran into serious conflict with them. We have already encountered reasons for this conflict throughout our meditations on this gospel. Here we are given a description of persons who crave status, recognition and respect. They are greedy and materialistic. They live by appearances. Sanctity was highly valued in society then. The Scribes play at being pious and spiritual, but their hearts are callous and self-centered. They are also ready to get rid of those who undermine their status and privilege. Jesus minces no words now in his open condemnation of them.

What does privilege look like in that world? To be treated with respect wherever you go and to be looked upon as a good and righteous person in a society where that counts in terms of your status and place in it, is privilege. So, how do the scribes use their privilege? They use it not only to gain their status and all that comes with that, but they use it to keep others down. In a society where people carry heavily a sense of moral guilt as an explanation for all the bad that happens to them and in society as a whole, and with the guilt also a shame that keeps them more silent and submissive as well as fearful for their eternal destiny, scribes had great privilege and power. And they used their privilege and power to oppress and dehumanize.

In our society today, privilege and power are not about holding guilt over people in the same way. Our society is much more secular than the religious state of Jesus' Jewish world. But it is about skin colour as we witness all the protests and outrage in the U.S, here in Canada and in other parts of the world too. How do we use our privilege to silence others, make ourselves, our concerns and our stories the centre of everything, and ignore how we are part of the problem of a society that makes fellow citizens feel vulnerable and afraid on a daily basis? There are many ways people are marginalized, put down and made vulnerable to abuse. Skin colour is one of the big ones. How are we going to be part of the change that needs to happen?

**Prayer:** Just like the Scribes, O God, I too can feel all too righteous and deserving of all the privileges I have. I too can forget your grace and focus on all I've done and all I am that makes me worthy of all the privileges I enjoy. And yet, here before you in honest prayer, I cannot ignore the stain in my soul, the false arrogance and pride, and behind that, the fear that maybe I am not as worthy, righteous or deserving of all the blessing and privilege I claim for myself every day. May I find new ways to be silent a little more, pay attention, listen, learn and seek new ways to be part of the change we need to make in this world of ours, beginning in myself. Thank you for embracing me by your free grace, O God. Thank you for loving me in all my broken compromises. Thank you for holding me as an infinitely precious part of your creation. May I embody and reflect your love in my way of being and engaging in the world around me; Amen.