

# 1st Sunday of Lent 2017 - Beware of Strutting Your Stuff

by Michael Flowers

---

*Lent is a time of intentional slowing down, reflection, and reform, where we return to the basics of following Jesus and seek a reward from God, rather than human approval.*

**Duration:** 16:00

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:13-16, Matthew 6:1-6, Matthew 6:16-18, Matthew 25:31-46, Luke 11:33-36, 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

**Topics:** "Lent"

---

## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the season of Lent and its emphasis on following Jesus. The sermon focuses on the first four verses of Matthew chapter 6, which talk about practicing righteousness in secret rather than for the approval of others. The speaker highlights the importance of embodying the ways of Jesus in the church and being a visible representation of God's kingdom on earth. The sermon concludes with the reminder to let our light shine before others so that they may see our good works and praise our Father in heaven.

---

## Transcript

First Sunday of Lent, right? Yeah. And I want to hear it, Lynn. I love Lent.

See, nobody can say it like that. It's a tradition every year. She's got to say it, because it really sets the tone.

It really does. I remember the first time I heard it. It was so impacting.

It really was. Yeah, nobody, no one had ever said that before on Earth, before you said it. I mean, it was a first.

And since then, it's really helped me to love Lent, you know, and embrace it, and yeah, it's great. You know, the word Lent itself is derived from two Anglo-Saxon words, which literally means springtide. I just learned that.

Springtide. I like that. We have Eastertide, we have Christmastide.

Lent is springtide. I think if we just called it that, it would feel better. I love springtide.

Yeah. Except for the pollens and everything that's coming with it. But anyway, it's a part of Lent, I guess.

And so, before the great celebration of Easter, in the following 50 days of Eastertide, the church sets aside 40 days to recalibrate, to recalibrate our lives in the way of Jesus. It's a time of slowing down to be more honest with ourselves. As long as we're distracted and going at the pace that our lives continue to increase throughout the year, we're just so driven by demands, right? We have to intentionally slow down so that we can actually hear our hearts and become more honest with ourselves.

I do. And so, a season to reflect and reform. That's what Lent is.

It's 40 days to delete and restore. Not cut and paste. Right? You're trying to delete something, but you're cutting and pasting it, it comes back.

Yeah, you don't want to do that. So you want to delete and restore. And empty that trash basket.

If you're like me, I save files that I delete just in case I might want to go back and retrieve them, right? And so, there's many disciplines in the world to intuit this need for repetition, because that's what it's all about. Some of us may be still learning how to appreciate repetition. Musicians achieve freedom to improvise by learning through arduous repetition, scales, and all manner of music theory.

Right? Like jazz, improv. Sounds like, wow, they're just so free and they're not looking at the music and they're improvising. It's because they did the disciplined work and they're not just playing let your fingers do the walking.

That's not what they're doing. They're playing off of a well-trained muscle memory system that's become one body and mind. That's what happens, right? It's kind of what happens when you learn how to swim, you learn how to drive.

Your body has to get in sync with what you know. Remember the first time you tried to use a clutch? I remember the first time I used a clutch in the UK. And I was on the wrong side and my clutch was here.

Well, actually, yeah, I guess my clutch was still the left foot, but I was doing this, you know. It took about a week and it was fantastic. I was there.

I didn't want to come back. That is the right side of the road, I've heard. It is, absolutely.

The Royals are in spring training right now. They're in lint. They're in springtide, you see.

What are they doing? They're returning to the fundamentals of baseball, which makes them world-class athletes, right? They have to humble themselves to run the rudiments of the game again, right? Oh, how many times do we have to do this, coach, right? As long as it takes. And so the first Sunday of lint always portrays Jesus being led by the Spirit into the wilderness for 40 days to be tempted by the devil. It's not unlike the movement of the church coming out of Epiphany, beginning with the baptism of Christ and the manifestation of God as Trinity, and then being led straightaway into lint.

From Epiphany to lint is Jesus moving from baptism into the wilderness for 40 days. A period of 40 days to return to the normative disciplines of all who follow Jesus. That's what lint is.

They tend to get set aside or we tend to get sloppy or we tend to forget. And so lint is one of those, okay, back to spring training. It's spring time.

Okay, so there's 46 days. I get it, right? You know why there's 46 days? Because we don't fast on Sunday. So where are you eating today, right? What are you drinking today, right? I've already planned it.

So between Ash Wednesday and Easter, there's 46 days. Those are six Sundays that we get to celebrate the little Easter every Sunday called the Eucharist, right? And that's why we don't fast when we're celebrating the Eucharist. And so what are the basics the season of lent seeks to emphasize? What are those? We're jumping back into the Sermon on the Mount to consider the first four verses of Matthew chapter 6. And we'll work through the rest of the chapter in the following weeks.

If you recall the former chapter 5, it speaks of the public nature of following Jesus. It ends up with you are the salt of the earth, the light of the world. Wow, what an extraordinary claim, right? Salt of the earth, light of the world, a city set on a hill.

It's an ecclesial vision. It's the vision of the church, right? Yeah. Amen.

So the church is to be the salt of the earth, the light of the world, a city set on a hill which cannot be hidden. Thus, Jesus concludes, in the same way, let your light shine before others that they may see your good works and praise your Father in heaven. It's a very visible, visible thing that Jesus is talking about.

Salty, shiny, and citified, right? Influenced by a visible representation of God's kingdom on earth is what we're to represent. We're to have influence, that is, by a visible representation of God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Influence by example is what being a city set on a hill is all about, right? Embodied.

The ways of Jesus being embodied in his church. Jesus recognizing the basic need in all of us to be accepted, to be affirmed, to be included. Also sees how these basic needs become disordered, whereby we begin to perform in order to be seen.

My need for acceptance has now driven me to do things in order to make impressions on others. That's what that can move towards in our broken states. This is what Jesus is addressing now in the moving it from public to private.

He's talking about in secret, not to be seen of people, of others. And all such performance for approval feeds back into my many fears and insecurities, cutting me off from the Father's gift. I appear to be generous, to be a generous person because I get more out of it than any currency.

And so Jesus says in light of this, beware of practicing your righteousness. I like that phrase. There's nothing against practicing righteousness.

He says, beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen. For then you will have no reward. I don't want you to be ripped off, Jesus says.

If you go in as a hypocrite, which the word means to wear a mask, right, in the theater. And to play something that you're really not. It's okay in the theater, but not in the theater of life.

Most social settings promote wearing masks. Yeah, not just church, but just most social settings. It sort of promotes that veneer and sometimes that veneer is appropriate.

You know, he asked me how I'm doing at a cocktail party. I'm not going to go in and tell you what my therapist told me, you know, for an hour. Please don't do that.

You've been hung up before. I can tell by honest people. No, I'm saying that it's just honesty in the wrong place.

Fake it, please. Fake it there. OK, but there is a place right to be honest.

And hopefully it's here. This is not a cocktail party. Right.

Yeah. Oh, and it's so hard in church to be honest. And it really is because we're the light of the world.

So beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them. Then you will have no reward from your father who is in heaven unseen. This motive in order to be seen is the Trojan horse close to all of us.

The extraordinary call to let our light shine before others that they may see our good deeds. Wow. Think about that, what that can do to the ego.

If we're effectively letting our light shine before others, that they see our good deeds and respond. Religious pride can come in. And now we're it.

So Jesus sees that. He sees that there's need for a corrective. And so because you are a city set on a hill which cannot be hid.

Beware. Because you are the salt of the earth, because you are the light of the world. Those are big britches to wear.

He's saying, hey, watch it. Beware. Beware of practicing your righteousness before men in order to be seen.

Jesus calls a halt to the innocent and spontaneous joy we get from making our Christianity visible. He calls a halt to that. That's Bonhoeffer's words.

He calls us to reflect on what and how we are doing. And what we're doing. Reflect on that.

And in this chapter, he's going to talk about when you give alms, when you minister and give to the poor, when you pray, when you fast. Those three things. The exceeding righteousness of Jesus followers must have a motive which lies beyond itself.

Of course, it has to be visible. It has to be visible, obviously, in chapter five. We're supposed to be a witness, right, of light and salt and all this great stuff that we share in participation in Jesus, right? The light is not ours.

It's his. He is God from God, life from life, true God from true God. And we participate in this light.

So it's not even ours. And realizing that really helps. It's the light of Christ.

As followers of Jesus, take care that it does not become visible simply for the sake of becoming visible. Bonhoeffer asked the question, from whom are we to hide the visibility of our discipleship? Who are we supposed to hide it from? From whom are we to hide the visible nature of such a life? Certainly not from others. For we are told to let them see our good deeds and glorify our Father in heaven.

No, says Bonhoeffer, we're to hide it from ourselves. Overly self-conscious acts of mercy and love can be noise. First Corinthians 13 seems to say, I can give my body to be burned and have not love.

I can be a noisy symbol. Is it for me that I'm doing these things? We have to ask the question. Our task is simply to keep on following, looking only to our Lord who goes on before, taking no notice of ourselves or what we are doing.

Our task is simply to keep on following, says Bonhoeffer really. Looking only to our Lord who goes on before, taking no notice of ourselves or what we are doing. Not to stop doing it.

The trick is taking no notice in doing it. I'm only doing what's required of the servant. And so in the well-known parable of the sheep and the goats, the righteous answers, Lord, when, when did we see you hungry or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger invite you in or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you? And the king will reply, I tell you the truth.

Whenever you did it for the, one of these least of my brothers of mine, sisters of mine, you did it for me. But they were unaware. When you give alms, says Jesus, do not let your right hand know what your left hand is doing.

You see, it's about my right hand and my left hand shouldn't know. If you don't let your right hand know what your left hand is doing. But they're both doing.

They're both serving. But they're unconscious of it. Oh, I'm not doing it to be loved more by the Father.

I'm not gaining my salvation by doing this in any way. In fact, I don't even think any of that. That's the goal.

That's the goal. Then your father will see what is done in secret and will reward you in secret. And so in this Lenten season, unselfconscious generosity is one such aim.

Living before an audience of one. Amen.

---

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/28/SID28622.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/michael-flowers/1st-sunday-of-lent-2017-beware-of-strutting-your-stuff/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**