

## **Devotion, Week of September 3, 2023**

### **Rev. Jeanne Simpson**

In Sunday School we are looking at Jesus' reinterpretation of the Levitical laws in a series of discussions/confrontations with Pharisees. In Luke, he eats several times at the homes of Pharisees. Commentators think the Pharisees would invite him to dinner in order to question him about these somewhat strange things he was doing and saying. In Luke 11, Jesus uses the phrase, "Woe to you" three times in conversation as he discusses their rabbinic rules about washing hands before eating. Jesus is very harsh – he says that the Pharisees "love to have the seat of honor in the synagogues and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces," but they are in reality "like unmarked graves on which people unknowingly walk." The word "woe" came up in discussion. What does it mean in this context? Jesus uses it in the Beatitudes also in Luke – he states blessings, and then he states woes.

In the Greek, the word means "a primary explanation of grief." I thought it meant a curse, but really it means not only indignation, but an intense sorrow over behavior or a circumstance. I never thought of "woe" as grief. I always thought of it as punishment from God – but it's much more emotional than that. In the case of Luke, Jesus is not just rebuking the pharisee over his narrow idea of fidelity toward God's law, but he is grieving over the pharisee's attitude. The pharisee is a holy man, dedicated to God. He should know better. He should act better. And Jesus grieves over this man's lack of understanding. So when we think of Jesus' blunt confrontations with the religious authorities, we should perhaps remember that this criticism is also based on his deep grief over those who should know who he is and welcome his teachings, but who cannot due to their blind acceptance of the Levitical law over compassion for their people.

*Jeanne*