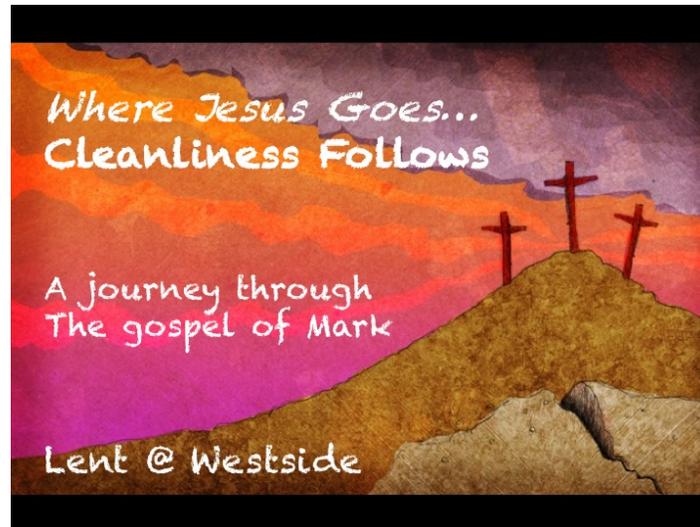


“Where Jesus Goes, Cleanliness Follows”; Series: Where Jesus Goes, We Follow

Mark 7:1-23

Westside Fellowship CRC; 4 March 2018

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I read this week for the first time in a long time about what the high priest of Israel needed to do in order to get himself ready to make the annual sacrifice for all the people of Israel on the Day of Atonement.



When he made this sacrifice, he went into the Holy of Holies in the temple and only one person was ever allowed in there and that person could only go in there one day each year. So, to get himself ready to go in, he would start one week ahead of time. He would leave his home and be put into seclusion so he was all by himself one week and there was no threat of anything unclean touching him. Only the cleanest foods prepared with the cleanest of processes would be brought to him. On the night before the Day of Atonement, he would stay up all night,

reading God's Word and praying and getting himself completely ready for the next day. On the actual day of atonement, he would be bathed from head to toe, dressed in pure, unstained white linen, and then go into the holy of holies, first to make a sacrifice for his own sins. Then he would come out, be bathed again completely from head to toe and clothed in a new pure garment, and go back in to make a sacrifice for the sins of all the priests, and then a third time he would come out, be bathed again, clothed again in an unstained pure white linen robe, and go in a third time to make a sacrifice for the sins of all the people. And he did this in full view of the people. They would watch it happen to make sure that he was completely clean.¹

So, in some ways, it isn't surprising that the Jewish leaders/teachers of the law got a little caught up in the cleanliness rules, some of which could be found in the Levitical law, but many of which were rules of their own making... rules that had developed over time. In our passage today, it was like the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were the handwashing police. They saw Jesus and his disciples eating food without washing their hands first. GASP! "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?!"

We get quite a peek into the window of the lives of these teachers of the law here... There's the ceremonial handwashing... apparently they also had some pretty strict rules about pots and pitchers and kettles... And, Jesus mentions an interesting example of something else they do... They side step the real and deep law of God by creating rules to avoid obeying the true law of God! So, say they had some money tucked away that they could have used to help care for their aging parents. But when it came time to actually use that money to help their aging parents, they could claim "Oh, no... that money is corban, meaning, devoted to the Lord. Can't touch it." See how they got around the law of love by making their own rules? Even rules that sounded really good?

I mean, a handwashing rule! What doesn't sound good about that?! Especially in this cold and flu season... sometimes I wish we had handwashing police in our churches and gyms and schools and workplaces and homes!

¹ See Tim Keller, *King's Cross: The Story of the World in the Life of Jesus*, pp. 82-83.

But Jesus can see right through these conscientious folks. You Pharisees, you honour God with your lips, but your hearts are far from God. Your worship means nothing because your teaching is all about human rules! Eugene Peterson translates Jesus' quotation from Isaiah this way: "Isaiah was right about frauds like you, hit the bull's-eye in fact:

These people make a big show of saying the right thing,
but their heart isn't in it.

They act like they are worshiping me,
but they don't mean it.

They just use me as a cover
for teaching whatever suits their fancy,
Ditching God's command
and taking up the latest fads."

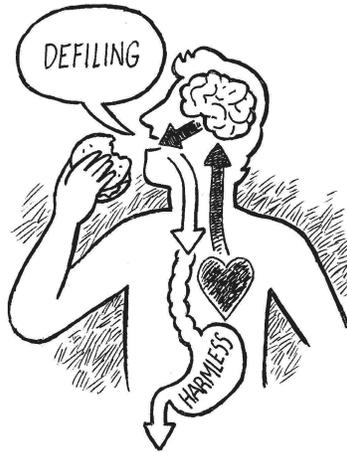
Scott Hoezee writes,

Wherever people make serving God all about keeping rules, sooner or later all of life becomes all about drawing lines to determine who's in and who's out (and the number of people on the outs will always be a lot huger than those who are allegedly "in"). And that's when religious folks become much more interested in telling people they will burn in hell than in proclaiming to them a gracious God who has already given everything to keep just that from happening.²

Friends, if it's all about following the rules, we are all doomed. Whether that be rules about washing ourselves or about what we eat or what we wear or what political party we belong to or what apps we have or let our kids have or whether or not we give things up for Lent or what schools we send our kids to or how much we tithe and when... If it's all about those rules, then we are all doomed... Even if we think we are on the right side of all the rules, there will always be that time that we broke our own rule, or a new rule that we make up or find or start oppressing other people with.

All of these rules are like foods that go in and out of the body. In some ways, they are neither here nor there. Jesus says that it's not what rules you munch on that make you clean or unclean, it's what comes from inside that shows what kind of cleanliness (or dirtiness!) is really in there.

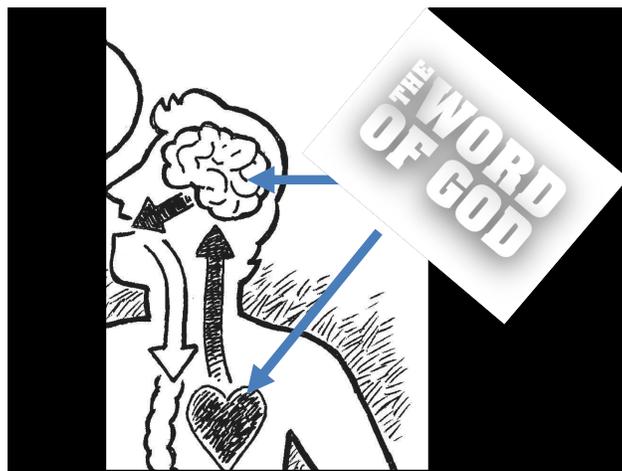
² http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-17b/?type=the_lectionary_gospel



What matters is the condition of the heart. And if our hearts are far from God, it doesn't matter how many really great rules we're following. If our hearts are far from God, yucky stuff is going to come out of us – all the stuff Jesus mentions in verse 21 and 22.

Now, this text is kind of dark... It talks about the evil that is in people and it talks about hearts being far from God... hypocrisy... dullness... uncleanness, but there's a light shining in the dark places of Mark 7. We find it in hearing what the Pharisees let go of... what the teachers of the law set aside... what they nullify. The light in this text is the command of God and the word of God.

The command of God and the word of God... The command and the word of God are what make you clean because the command the word of God are what truly get inside you – not just at your surface, but in the very center of your heart.



The command and the word of God are what have the power to change you... to change your very heart... to change your mind.. to turn you around... and that what comes out of you will be that which pleases God – not because you’re keeping some rules – but because this is the life that you want to live! It’s not, “You are what you eat.” It’s “You are what you love!”

And when the word of God gets inside you, transformation takes place, and instead of the darkness, beautiful things come from you!

Instead of sexual immorality – sexual joy and fullness and shalom!

Instead of theft, a life of giving and hospitality!

Instead of murder, actions that promote the wellbeing of others.

Instead of adultery, faithfulness to your relational calls.

Instead of greed, contentment and satisfaction.

Instead of malice, kindness!

Instead of deceit, truthiness!

Instead of lewdness, words chosen with care!

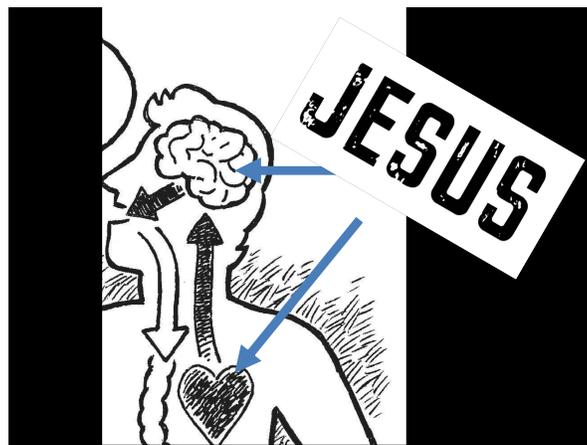
Instead of envy, joy in the reality of the gifts of others!

Instead of slander, respecting others with your speech.

Instead of arrogance, humility!

Instead of folly, wisdom!

All these virtues come from inside and are evidence of the cleanliness that came because Jesus was there!



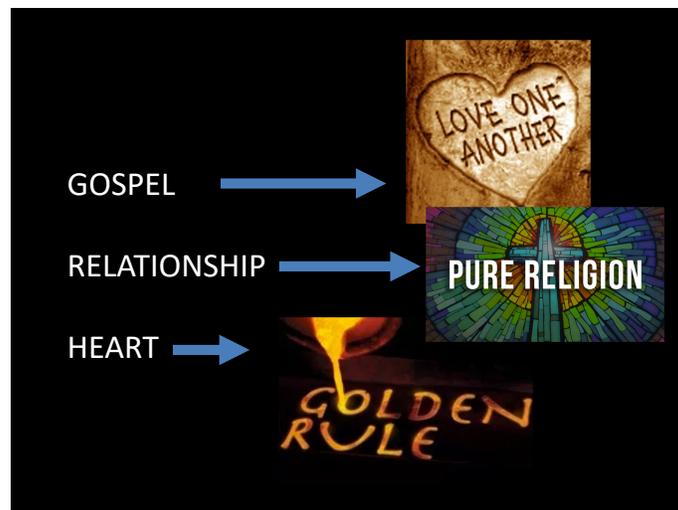
Now, some people take a passage like this and throw it into black and white categories, like it's an either/or thing... On one side, people might say, is the law – and that's what the Pharisees were about – and Jesus was all about gospel. Or, people might say, on one side is religion – and that's what the teachers of the law were about – and Jesus was about relationship. Or lately, an example south of the border, a war is raging about gun violence and gun control and you have people making either/or comments about this – it's not about rules about guns, it's about the heart! Or, it's not about the heart, it's about the need for gun control! As if it were as simple as dividing it up like that. It's not. It's just not. It's not gun control *or* heart change. It's not law *or* gospel. It's not religion *or* relationship.

Yes, gospel and relationship and heart change are the way of Jesus... Yes, AND...

In the wake of the gospel, there is a place for the law – and it's the law of love!

In the wake of a heart change, there is a place for rules – and these are rules that give life!

And in the wake of our relationship to Jesus, there is a place for religion – and it's religion that is pure and true!...



The place for law and rules and religion is the place of gratitude! As Scott Hoezee says, “it’s all gravy, it’s all joy, it’s all delight. Because then ‘living for Jesus’ issues forth from hearts that dance to the tune of grace!”

Now, we’ve talked about food as something that goes in and out of the body and doesn’t really get to the heart... So, what in the world are we doing here? Is this just bread and

juice that goes in and out of us? If Jesus is in our hearts and minds, what in the world does food have to do with Jesus?

Belgic Confession, Article 35

HEIDI: to support the physical and earthly life
God has prescribed for us
an appropriate earthly and material bread,
which is as common to all people
as life itself.

ALL: But to maintain the spiritual and heavenly life
that belongs to believers,
God has sent a living bread
that came down from heaven:
namely Jesus Christ,
who nourishes and maintains
the spiritual life of believers
when eaten—
that is, when appropriated
and received spiritually
by faith.

HEIDI: To represent to us
this spiritual and heavenly bread
Christ has instituted
an earthly and visible bread as the sacrament of his body
and wine as the sacrament of his blood.

ALL: He did this to testify to us that
just as truly as we take and hold the sacrament in our hands
and eat and drink it with our mouths,
by which our life is then sustained,
so truly we receive into our souls,
for our spiritual life,
the true body and true blood of Christ,
our only Savior.

HEIDI: We receive these by faith,
which is the hand and mouth of our souls.

Now it is certain
that Jesus Christ did not prescribe
his sacraments for us in vain,
since he works in us all he represents
by these holy signs,
although the manner in which he does it
goes beyond our understanding
and is incomprehensible to us,
just as the operation of God's Spirit
is hidden and incomprehensible.

ALL: Yet we do not go wrong when we say
that what is eaten is Christ's own natural body
and what is drunk is his own blood—
but the manner in which we eat it
is not by the mouth, but by the Spirit
through faith.