

August 30, 2009 Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9; Psalm 15; James 1:17-27; Mark 7

- **Read Mark 7 from “The Message”**
- “You’re either in, or you’re out.” --Heidi Klum, from Project Runway
- James Dunn, of the 1st century believed that this passage was concerned with “identity-markers”, visible signs to let believers/Pharisees know who was in and who was out – tendency to be exclusive.
- Martin Luther discusses 7 markers or outward signs of belonging for Christian believers:
- Yet, how does this argument come into play w/the supposed fight over the washing of hands for the Pharisees, who are versed in the essence of the Torah, the law, being the Shema – love the Lord your God. . . love your neighbor as yourself”
- **Story: Little Boy Washing Hands**

Just before sitting down to Sunday dinner after church, mom asked her two children to wash their hands before eating. Her Son startled her with his response: “Jesus said it’s okay to eat without washing your hands!”

“Where did you hear such a thing?” the lad’s mother asked.

“Well,” the boy continued, “The Frizzies (the Pharisees) were being tattletales on the disciples. They told Jesus the disciples were eating without washing their hands and Jesus told them they were a bunch of hypocrites.”

The mother continued, “Did Jesus tell his disciples they didn’t have to wash their hands?”

“I don’t know,” the boy replies, “But he didn’t make ‘em either – and if it’s good enough for Jesus, it’s good enough for me!” **(John Jewell, 2000)**

- Fighting b/c worshipping rule/tradition instead of God – our focus and center; it’s not really about whether to wash your hands or not it’s about the outward actions matching the inward thoughts
- It’s not the religious practice of certain things that got them in trouble, but the rules took the place of God at the center of their lives; instead of “God reigns” it turned into “rules reign.” We do a lot of religious practices – liturgy, prayer, hymn singing – these things are good! But, if we get caught up in focusing too much on how we do it, we lose sight of why we do it and are worshipping “what we do” instead of “who we do it for” – God – who first did so much for us!
- **Story: Mistaken Identity**

An honest man was being tailgated by a stressed out woman on a busy boulevard, when suddenly, the light turned yellow just in front of him. He did the right thing, stopping at the crosswalk, even though he could have beaten the red light by accelerating through the intersection. The tailgating woman hit the roof, and the horn, screaming in frustration as she missed her chance to get through the intersection. As she was still in mid-rant, she heard a tap on her window and looked up into the face of a very serious police officer. The officer ordered her to exit her car with her hands up. He took her to the police station where she was searched, finger printed, photographed, and placed in a holding cell. After a couple of hours, a policeman approached the cell and opened the door. She was escorted back to the booking desk where the arresting officer was waiting with her personal effects. He said, "I'm very sorry for this mistake. You see, I pulled up behind your car while you were blowing your horn, flipping off the guy in front of you, and cussing a blue streak at him. I noticed the 'What Would Jesus Do?' bumper sticker, the 'Follow Me to Sunday-School' bumper sticker, and the chrome-plated Christian fish emblem on the trunk. Naturally, I assumed you had stolen the car."

- The danger of only relying on outward appearances – we are sinful people and are not perfect; Jesus was not addressing the issue of whether people washing their hands or not; he was focusing on the huge number of rules and regulations that the Pharisees were trying to abide by and getting more caught up in the rules/traditions themselves. It's not these rules that make you acceptable to God – it's the inward – is God at the center of you/of what you do?
- Visiting w/some in our community and hearing "good things" about our congregation – actions matching what we say we believe
- It's not about worshipping the law, it's about worshipping God. The law helps us to live with one another. The gospel reminds us that God gives us the gifts of love and forgiveness through Jesus, as well as the gift of guidance in the presence of the Holy Spirit.
- God reaches out to us in love and forgiveness. When we know that, it opens us up to live a life in service to others to share our joy.
- **Story: Lip Service**

According to the story, Queen Victoria was once at a diplomatic reception in London. The guest of honor was an African chieftain. All went well during the meal until, at the end, finger bowls were served. The guest of honor had never seen a British finger bowl, and no one had thought to brief him beforehand about its purpose. So he took the finger bowl in his two hands, lifted it to his mouth, and drank its contents – down to the very last drop! For an instant there was breathless silence among the British upper crust and then they began to whisper to one another. All that stopped in the next instant as the Queen, Victoria, silently took her finger bowl in her two hands, lifted it, and drank its contents! A moment later 500 surprised British

ladies and gentlemen simultaneously drank the contents of their own fingerbowls. [*It was “against the rules” to drink from a fingerbowl, but on that particular evening Victoria changed the rules – because she was, after all, the Queen. It is “against the rules” not to wash your hands before you eat and on that the Pharisees called the hand of the disciples who followed Jesus. Jesus quoted Isaiah when he recognized the hypocrisy, “These people honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me.”*] **(Brett Blair, www.eSermons.com)**

Other Thoughts and Resources:

- lectionarysermons.com
- things are good! But, if we get caught up in focusing too much on how we do it, we lose sight of why we do it and are worshipping “what we do” instead of “who we do it for” – God – who first did so much for us!
- What would happen if we declared ourselves “corban”? (Set apart and holy) What would that look like? What would that mean? God already sees us as holy, created in God’s image! God already hands over gifts to us. Maybe the question is about believing we are worth God’s love. God knows it – do you?

From *The Gospel According To Saint Mark*; Blacks NT commentaries; general editor Henry Chadwick, 1991.

- Vs 6, 9, 14, 18, 20 – introductory phrase repeated; gathered together & were originally separate – “And he said to them. . . “
- Vs 1-5 intro raises two questions 1) Why do disciples not behave according to tradition of elders? 2) Why do they eat w/unclean hands?
- Vs 6-13 & 14-23 deal w/these questions
- Careful structure conceals tension in material: 1st two sayings answer the criticism w/counter-attacks – complaint based on Pharisees own traditions, not on the Torah.
- And more radical – question the Torah itself by challenging its demands for Levitical purity.
- 2 situations probably given at different times!
- Law and Gospel Tension: strict adherents of Torah accused of failing to keep it, and their Christian accusers claim on the one hand of fulfilling it, on the other to be free from its restrictions. Purpose of Torah, rather than its detailed requirements, which is seen as important. **Anything that’s “corban” has been offered to God is holy and can’t be used for ordinary purposes (p 177) [Mark 7:11 – corban, gift devoted to God; set apart as holy]**