

August 22nd – 23rd, 2021: 15th Sunday of Pentecost

Mark 7: 1 – 8, 14,15, 21 – 23

Pastor Arndt

⁸You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.”

¹⁵Nothing outside a man can make him ‘unclean’ by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him ‘unclean.’” ²¹For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²²greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly. ²³All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean.’”

In Christ Jesus.

This past week I had the opportunity to play a few holes of golf with one of our faculty members. After hitting a nice shot, they said, *“I hit that one on the screws”*. I know that expression means to hit something solid or well. But a debate broke out as to whether you are supposed to hit something *“on the screws”* or *“between the screws”*.

The answer is the second one. Old golf clubs were made of wood and had a thin layer of laminate attached to the face of the club with screws. The *“sweet spot”* on the club was the area between the screws. Thus, the idiom... *“to hit something between the screws”*.

An idiom is an expression *“having a meaning not deducible from those of the individual words.”* To understand an idiom, you need the proper context. If the context is lost, the meaning of words can be changed to mean just about anything.

The problem, or point of contention, in our lesson for today is highlighted by Jesus when he says, *“You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.”* The Pharisees have lost the proper context for God’s Word. Scripture, for them, has become like a forgotten idiom. Specifically, they are struggling with the idea of what makes a person sinful or unclean.

I. Garbage in, Garbage out... Good In, Good out?

Jesus puts sin back in its proper context. He says, *“Nothing outside a man can make him unclean by going into him.”*

In Genesis chapter 1, God is not lying when he looks over his creation and says, *“It was good”*. There is nothing in all creation that was harmful or destructive. (Yes, even the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was not destructive. Used properly, it was a beautiful altar of worship where Adam and Eve could show love and obedience to God.) The words *“used properly”* here are key.

We would like to think that if good things were placed in front of us, we would use those good things to produce good results. Jesus says, *“Not so fast”*.

Marriage and the relationship between male and female are good things. Sadly, we are all too familiar with what happens when marriage is taken out of the context of God. At this point, resist the urge to leap to extreme examples in society. Examine your own heart. How have you taken the good and perfect gift of marriage and sexuality and from them produced *“immorality, adultery, and lewdness”*?

Our standard of living (*wealth, housing, education, medical care, and so on...*) means that we are among the most privileged people not only in our world, but in the history of our world. What have we chosen to do with these ingredients? It makes no sense that a people with such privilege should rank so poorly when it comes to crime, murder, theft, incarceration, and over all lack of joy and contentment.

If such things surprise us, they are no surprise to Jesus. He understands what a sinful heart does with blessings. He says, *“Out of the heart come... theft, murder, greed, malice, deceit, envy, slander, arrogance, folly.”*

The problem is not outside us. The problem is within us. Thanks be to God, so is the solution!

II. A God So Near Us

In our OT lesson Moses says to the people, *“What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us.”*

Every day, Moses watched God feed his people with manna. After breakfast, the people could take the short walk to the center of their camp. There was the tabernacle – the place where God made his home. As close as God was, Moses could only dream of what the future would hold.

When Jesus entered this world, he called sinners to himself and said, *“I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.”* (John 14: 20)

It makes sense that *“Jesus is in the Father”*. Jesus is certainly large enough and powerful enough to shelter me in Him. What shocks us though is the final part of Jesus’ words, *“I am in you”*. God does not save us from sin by surrounding us with good things. He saves us by staking claim to our hearts and living there.

When God takes control of the heart it changes everything.

III. Taste and See That The Lord Is Good

It always amazes me when I consider food. Who was the first person to look at a shrimp and say, *“I think I’m going to eat that!”* Yuck! This is slimy and crunchy at the same time! Eventually someone discovered that if you remove the shell and cook it, it tastes marvelous!

A chef uses a knife, spoon, and heat. These are the utensils that Jesus uses.

- The cross: The cross is not a crutch or a “help” in our spiritual life. God died for you. His commitment was total. His death (as God) means your life. Every corner of your life is made alive in the cross.
- Grace: Each moment and blessing of your life is undeserved, yet God is glad to give it.
- Mercy: This is the peculiar attitude of God that the more helpless and pathetic something becomes, the more passionately God’s heart goes out to it.

What joy it gives us to see Jesus use these tools as he walks among us. One of my favorite examples takes place a few chapters before our lesson.

Jesus encounters a man who is possessed by evil spirits. The spirits have taken utter control of him. The man has no clothes and lives among the tombs (not like our nice cemeteries). Jesus comes along and says, *"I'm going to use that!"*

Mercy, Grace, and the Cross are all put to use. Jesus drives the spirits from the man and then commissions him to go and tell the good news of what God has done for him. How marvelous is that!

My sin comes from within. But God enters. This is what makes us clean. This is the truth of Christ that we pass on.

-Amen