

Pentecost 14 8/26/18
Mark 7:1-13 16B

WELL DID ISAIAH PROPHECY OF YOU HYPOCRITES, AS IT IS WRITTEN, 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR FROM ME; IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE COMMANDMENTS OF MEN.' YOU LEAVE THE COMANDMENTS OF GOD AND HOLD TO THE TRADITION OF MEN.

I'm going to take a wild guess and say that because you are here this morning, you are a disciple of Jesus Christ. As a disciple of Jesus Christ, you do the things the disciples of Jesus Christ do – you say your prayers, you read your Bible, you come to the worship services of God's House. And, perhaps, you even eat with defiled -- that is, unwashed -- hands.

Not long after Jesus walked on water, Jesus and the boys stopped to get a little lunch. As they were eating, some scribes and Pharisees came up and gathered around Jesus. Now, these good fellas had come from Jerusalem, so no doubt they were on a fact-finding mission. They were there to dig up dirt on Jesus that could be used against Him. And wouldn't you know, they found some. They found out that some of Jesus' disciples eat with defiled -- that is, unwashed -- hands. Now before you all do the "oh, gross, that is sick" thing, remember we are not talking just about unwashed hands, but ***unwashed*** hands.

It's like this: The scribes and Pharisees had a lot of rules about how things should be done. And, their manmade rules covered virtually every part of life. According to their rules, things had to be done in a particular way, at a particular time, and it was all very specific. Their big concern was not that Jesus' disciples did not wash their hands before they sat down to eat because they would spread germs; their concern was that the disciples did not wash their hands according to the traditions of the elders.

You see, one of the things all of their rules covered was how you wash your hands. All people wash their hands before they eat, but they don't do it according to the tradition of the elders, especially after they had been in the marketplace. And, maybe, just maybe even by accident, you touched or brushed up against a Gentile or someone else or something "unclean," -- the marketplace being a public place after all -- and that made you unclean, so you had to wash according to the tradition of the elders.

Here's how they did it. You held up your hands so that the fingertips pointed up towards heaven. Then you would take one and a half egg shells of water and pour that over your fingertips so that it would flow down towards the wrist. Then with the fist of one hand, you washed the palm of the other. When that's down, you point them down, so the water can run from the wrists down to the fingertips. That is how you wash your hands according to the tradition of the elders.

And mind you, this is not a matter of hygiene. This is a matter of being right with God. The reason you washed your hands like that is so that you could make yourself holy and pleasing to God. That's why you did it. If you didn't do it that way, it was considered sin. All good Jews knew this. All good Jewish teachers, being responsible for their students, made sure their students washed their hands according to the tradition of the elders.

Jesus' disciples, some of them at least, didn't bother to wash their hands according to the tradition of the elders. So, these scribes and Pharisees that came from Jerusalem called Jesus out on this and asked Him, "Why do you disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" (v. 5). Well, Jesus was happy to respond,

"Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written,

‘This people honors me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me;
in vain do they worship me,
teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’
You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men”
(vs. 6-8).

That was not the answer they expected, but it was exactly the words they needed to hear, and so do you. Far too often, the disciples of Jesus, both in the past and today, get caught up in following the traditions of the elders. There is so many of them. You’ve heard them. You know them. Thou shalt not dance. You can’t drink booze. Caffeine is forbidden. Don’t eat meat on Friday. You must pray facing east, five times per day. You must make a pilgrimage to this place or that place. You must give an exact percentage of your income to God. You must post this picture of Jesus on your Facebook wall or bad things will happen.

The problem becomes I must follow the traditions of men in order to be pleasing to God. That’s the trap that is set by the scribes and the Pharisees and that’s the trap people fall into. And Dear Child of God, the IMPORTANT thing to remember is that there is not one word of these is in the Bible; it’s all the traditions of men.

The tradition of the elders is a trap that you fall into. Because of that tradition, you are trying to please God by your behavior. You are trying to make yourself right with God by what you do. Isaiah said something about that. He said this, “Your hands are defiled with blood and your fingers with iniquity” (59:3a). That’s true because when you try to make yourself right with God by what you do, your lips are saying, “I believe in Jesus,” but in your heart you are saying, “Jesus is not the one who saved me, I am the one who saved me”. And that makes you guilty of the sin of idolatry and

your hands are defiled with blood and your fingers with iniquity. How well did Isaiah talk about you. You are the one who honors God with your lips but your heart is far from Him. For that idolatry, for that hypocrisy, for that sin, you deserve, death and eternal hell.

But there is Good News for you. Isaiah also had this to say, “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool” (1:18). There is no amount of hand washing that could ever make you right with God. There’s no way you could wash all the sin off your hands. The only One that could do that was Jesus. He is the One who came and took what was in your hands and put it in His hands so that He could carry it to Calvary’s cross. There upon that cross, your sin, your iniquity, your idolatry, your hypocrisy was nailed to the cross. And from His holy hands, and feet and side and brow came His holy, innocent, precious blood which washed away all of your sin. Christ Jesus died upon that cross for you. And it’s His death upon that cross that makes you right with God. Then on the 3rd day, Jesus rose from the dead to bring to you all that His death upon the cross won for you.

No washing according to the tradition of men is going to make you pleasing to God. You can wash your hands with anti-bacterial soap from sunrise to sunset, but it is not going to save you from your sins. Only Jesus can and did save you from your sins. He did that for you on Calvary’s cross and rising again the 3rd day. And, He brings His forgiveness and life to you with His nail scarred hands to wash your body with water and Word, so that you died and rose with Him in holy baptism. With those same nail scarred hands, He places into your mouth to eat and to drink His very body and blood, in with and under the bread and the wine, to forgive you all your sins. And, He speaks His words of eternal life your ears.

That's not the tradition of the elders or the rules, the regulations, the opinion of men; that's the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.