

14 S. after Pentecost 8/29/21  
Mark 7:14-23 17B

SERMON TEXT IS THE APPOINTED GOSPEL READING FOR THIS SUNDAY, FROM THE 7<sup>TH</sup> CHAPTER OF MARK'S GOSPEL.

Let me tell you a story, and it's a Bible story.

There was once a man named David and he was a king, the king of all Israel. In the spring of the year, the king sent his army off to war. But, he stayed in Jerusalem, so he could have a little fun.

Like the day he was out walking and saw a woman named Bathsheba taking a bath. She was quite attractive, and so the king sent for her, and she went quite willingly to the king, and they committed adultery and conceived a child together, even though they were both married to other people.

Let me tell you another story from the Bible. There was a man named Naboth and he had a vineyard. His vineyard meant a great deal to him because it had belonged to his father and he had inherited it from his father. And his vineyard just happened to be right next to the king's palace. So, the king, Ahab, said to Naboth, "Give me your vineyard, because I want it for a vegetable garden." Naboth said, "No, it was my dad's vineyard, I inherited it from my dad, and it means a lot to me because it had been my dad's." So, Ahab the king went home and pouted, and whined, and sobbed and held his breath until he turned blue. His wife, the wicked queen Jezebel, asked him what was the matter. And the king answered that Naboth wouldn't give him his vineyard. And Jezebel said, "Uffda, you're the king! You can have anything your little heart desires." So, she wrote a letter in the king's name and sealed it with his seal that said, "Declare a fast. And have two worthless men lie that Naboth cursed God and the

king.” And they did as wicked queen Jezebel instructed them to do, and they took Naboth outside the city and stoned him to death. And, Ahab took possession of Naboth’s vineyard to be his very own.

I am telling you these stories this morning, so I can tell you this: In the course of your life, you get a lot of advice. In elementary school, they tell you don’t put your tongue on the monkey bars when its 20-below. And that advice continues into your adult years: Make your bed. Wear deodorant. Eat your fruits and vegetables. If you live in North Dakota in January, you will want to put a blanket in your car before you set out on the highway.

You get a lot of advice. And, the absolute worst -- **WORST** – advice you will ever get is this: **Follow your heart**.

The heart is more than just the organ that pumps blood through your body. The heart is the center of the person. The center of physical life and also their spiritual life. That means that the heart is the seat of emotions.

And that’s why the advice to follow your heart is not very good advice; in fact, its horrible advice. David and Bathsheba and Ahab and Jezebel are prime examples of that. They are living witnesses to what Jesus says,

“What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person” (vv. 20-23).

When we see David and Bathsheba coveting and committing adultery; when we see the greed, envy, theft, and murder of Ahab and Jezebel, we see what happens when you follow your heart.

With His words in our Gospel, Jesus is condemning their sins. And, He’s condemning your sins, as well. When you follow your heart, you are defiled. You stand condemned.

You may well recall that there is more to the story of David and Bathsheba than adultery. Bathsheba's husband happened to be one of the king's generals, so when he found out she was with child, David called him home from the war, thinking he would lay with his wife and that would provide cover for her pregnancy. But Uriah was an honorable man, who wouldn't do that when his men were fighting. So, David plots and schemes to cause his death. A year goes by and God sends the prophet Nathan to call David to repentance. Seeing his sin, David repents. He repents with the words of the 51<sup>st</sup> Psalm,

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;  
According to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.  
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin  
(vv. 1-2).

The Good News of the Gospel is that God has mercy and blots out transgressions, for David, and for you. And here's how He does it: He sent His only-begotten Son to be born of a woman. As a man, the very Son of God walked upon the face of the earth all the way to Jerusalem, where He was defiled by being beaten and whipped, and nailed to the cross. There, from His sacred wounds on His head, His hands and feet, His side, the blood of Jesus flowed to blot out all our transgressions, to wash and cleanse us from our sins.

He rose the 3<sup>rd</sup> day to bring the cleansing flood into your life. And He does it in the waters of Holy Baptism. In that blessed washing of Water and Word, God has given you a new heart -- the heart of Christ Himself. You have died to sin and all unholy desires and been raised to a new life in Christ. Our Lord's only desire was to do the will of His Father and, living in Him, that is our only desire. When we pray, "Thy will be done," we are

praying that God would strengthen and keep us firm in His Word and faith and help us to live a God-pleasing life.

But, as we all know all-too-well, that is easier said than done. Martin Luther once observed that though the Old Adam in us has been baptized, he swims so very well. How true that is! We have died to sin and all evil desires, but who the thoughts of our hearts defile us. What is your life saying about the condition of your heart? What do your thoughts about your neighbor say about your heart? What does the way you talk to your spouse, children or parents say about what is in your heart? What would your checkbook say about the condition of your heart? What about the way you spend your time?

Throughout our earthly pilgrimage, the desires and intents of our hearts continue to defile our thoughts, words, and deeds. As we live as a saint and a sinner on this side of heaven, we remember that repentance is nothing more than a return to the waters of our baptism. Daily, we return to the waters of our baptism to drown the desires and will of our sinful hearts, so that God can come to us in His steadfast love and abundant mercy to wash us thoroughly from our iniquity and cleanse us from our sin. And, He does it through the words of Absolution. He does it as He joins His Word with bread and wine to make it the live-giving feast of the body of blood of Christ Himself.

Through these means of grace, God strengthens and keeps us in Christ so that we may be Christ to the world. This is why we pray: “nourish in us every virtue and bring to completion every good intent that we may grow in grace and bring forth the fruit of good works.”

“Follow your heart”. No, that’s not very good advice at all. Rather, we listen to Jesus who says, “If anyone would come after Me, let him deny

himself and take up his cross and FOLLOW ME” (Mt 16:24).

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.