

15 S. after Pentecost 9/1/24
Mark 7:14-23 17B

“WHAT COMES OUT A PERSON IS WHAT DEFILES HIM”

“We have met the enemy, and he is us.” Perhaps, you have heard those words made famous by Pogo the Possum in several cartoon strips in the early 1970’s. Those words, which are actually a twist on the words from an American Naval officer in the War of 1812, continue to resurface in our day in moments of honesty, transparency.

I call these words to your attention this morning, because they illustrate the truth for us of what Jesus is teaching in our Gospel lesson. Jesus is teaching us that the source of evil and our sin is not “out there” in the world, from outside of us, but rather it is here **{HEART}** – our sinful hearts with all its sinful inclinations, lusts, and desires.

Recall our Gospel reading from last week. The Pharisees and scribes attacked Jesus because some of his disciples did not wash their hands before they ate. And again, to reiterate, this was not a commandment of God. This was a man-made rule, an opinion of men, that the Pharisees and scribe were putting above the Word of God. They were trying to make holiness before God something outside of them, something they did.

This week, Jesus continues to teach us the same thing -- that holiness is not from outside of us, something we do or do not do. He does that by using the example of the Old Testament dietary laws, **specifically from the 11th chapter of Leviticus**. Jesus is teaching us that what we eat or do not eat is not our problem before God.

No, Jesus says, you know the enemy, because the enemy is you. What is “out there,” that is, what goes into the body from outside of us is not the problem. Listen to what Jesus says,

“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” (vv. 21-22).

I. Evil, sin, comes out in our words and deeds because it already lurks within us. This is what we confess before God and the world, “We are by nature sinful and unclean.”

This is a truth we must continually learn and be aware of, My Friends, because the mantra of our day is “Follow your heart”. It sounds so sweet, doesn’t it? It just oozes emotion and sentiment! But, you know all too well what happens when you follow the evil and lusts of your heart. You end up in big trouble.

The Bible is full of people – people like you and me – who ignored God to follow their own heart. Sin was crouching at Cain’s door and he was angry, so he murdered his brother in cold blood. Oh, and Father Abraham had heard God’s Word of Gospel promise again and again. God had given him a most beautiful wife, so he lied and said she was his sister to protect his own skin – not once, but 2x. David burned with lust for another’s man wife, and that led to a whole host of sin. Judas, long before he betrayed our Lord, was a thief, *having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it (Jn 12:6)*. And our friend Peter, who vowed never to deny Jesus, loudly cried, *“I do not know Him” (Lk 22:57)*.

“We have seen the enemy, and he is us.” *“What comes out of a person is what defiles him” (v. 20).*

When you follow your heart, the evil that lurks within shows itself in your life, what you say, and what you do. What you do in your own house, in your own room, is your business. And, besides, you have right to do it, right! So, you carry on that secret affair. It's just between the two of you and only the two of you will ever know about it. You lie, to your insurance agent, your teacher, your spouse. You are disgruntled and discontent because you are jealous of your neighbor. You allow the sun go down on your anger, and don't forgive and be reconciled. And besides, everyone knows what a scoundrel that other guy is anyway. And just in case they don't, you use your tongue to gossip, and defame and destroy their reputation.

"There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him but the things that come out of a person are what defile him," Jesus says (v. 15). That's why we get into big trouble when we follow our hearts, for the Prophet Jeremiah says, *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick (17:9).*

II. But, here's the Good News, the really Good News for you Dear Child of God. There is something outside of you that makes you pure, holy, and undefiled – that something, or I should someone, is Jesus Christ.

St. Paul says it this way, *For our sake [God the Father] made [Jesus] to be sin who knew so sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Co 5:21).* Jesus took all the things that come out of your heart that defile you, all your evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness, and carried them all to the cross. There, He died as the wages of them all.

His death on that cross, His burial, His resurrection on the 3rd day accomplished something that could never happen in your heart -- it won for you the entire forgiveness for all your sins.

III. There is only one solution to our sinful condition, My Friends: we must have a new heart. That is why we rejoice in the promise of God through the Prophet Ezekiel, *"I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh"* (Ez 36:26).

That's what God does in the new birth of our baptism. Jesus takes all the forgiveness He won by His death, burial, and resurrection and pours in over you in the water and Word of your baptism to give you a clean heart, a new heart; the heart of Christ Himself that delights in doing God's will; a heart that is turned in faith to God and in love towards your neighbor.

That's the heart that is fed with Christ's very Body and Blood, given and shed for you. That is the heart that is fed by the words of life that He speaks into our ears.

This means, My Friends in Christ, we have a new heart that calls upon God's name in every trouble, praying, praising, and giving thanks; holds God's Word sacred, and gladly hears and learns it; honors those in authority over you, serves and obeys them, and loves and cherish them; one that lives a sexually pure and decent life in what you say and do; one that does not gossip, but defends your neighbor, speaks well of him, and explains everything in the kindest way; a heart that is content with what you have been given, and forgives your neighbor just as God has forgiven you in Christ Jesus.

I have a little confession to make: I love to do baptisms. The liturgy of our Baptismal Service is wonderful. One of the things we do during the

baptismal service is to present the one baptized a burning candle. That burning candle reminds all of us that, in Christ, we are the light of the world. With the heart of Christ, we are to reflect and show Christ with all of our lives. This is why we pray in the words of our Collect for today: “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.”

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