

15th Sunday after Pentecost
“God’s cleansing of man’s heart” (Mark 7:14-16)
September 1, 2024
Rev. Ed Weber

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for the Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost is from our Gospel reading, Mark 7:14-16

“14 When He had called all the multitude to Himself, He said to them, “Hear Me, everyone, and understand: 15 There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man. 16 If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!”

So far our text.

Our text picks up where we left off last week after Jesus was criticized by the Pharisees for not following the special hand washing traditions of the elders and many other such things that the Pharisees invented to elevate, supplant and substitute the traditions of man for the Word of God. What was Jesus’ response to them?

“As it is written:” Jesus quoted Isaiah 29:

**“This people honors Me with *their* lips,
But their heart is far from Me.”**

The heart, the soul – is either with Jesus or far from Him. **“Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men”** is the formula for one’s heart to reject the teachings of God. For only in the Word of God, the teaching of God does God reveal what cleanses the sinful heart of man – the Gospel.

The Pharisees had literally laid aside the commandment of God, God’s Word...and held on to, grasped, and made their sole norm and source for belief – the tradition of men... man’s ideas, and ultimately man’s ways of salvation, that is...works righteousness.

The people were seduced into believing that if they followed the outward rituals that the Pharisees prescribed, they too could achieve a righteous heart. So, out of great love for these misguided people and for all of us, Jesus turns His attention to the laity, and speaks to them directly about what makes the soul unclean.

“Hear Me, everyone, and understand: 15 There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man. 16 If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!”

Everyone...Jesus is speaking especially to you and me this morning and everyone who is listening to His Word through our Live stream.

The Israelites were separated by God, after they left Egypt, from all unbelieving nations. They were given ceremonial laws and moral laws to keep them from following false gods and sinful living. Certain foods were considered unclean, such as the animal whose hoof is not parted or do not chew the cud, chew the food over and over again.

People were considered ceremonially unclean if they touched the dead, or someone with an infectious disease, or because of discharges related to reproduction. Being unclean because of a ceremonial law was not sinful. But it continued to remind people that all humanity is born sinful since the fall of man and needs to be spiritually cleansed. As we heard last week in Psalm 14:

**“The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men,
To see if there are any who understand, who seek God.
3 They have all turned aside, They have together become corrupt;
There is none who does good, No, not one.”**

The Pharisees remedy? Outward acts of piety to try and achieve righteousness – eat this and don’t eat that. But Jesus simply says it’s not what goes into the body which defiles a person, literally makes a person unclean, but what comes out.

And what comes out is a huge mess of evil. Jesus gets real specific in our Gospel reading, doesn’t He? He who has ears let him hear.

“What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. 21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, 22 thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. 23 All these evil things come from within and defile a man.”

Where does it come from? From man's sinful heart. Your heart and my heart is not pure. Evil thoughts, schemes, which unless drowned, result also in evil deeds.

In our Old Testament reading, we have an example of what happened to the Israelites when they didn't listen to God. The Israelite men were seduced by the Moabite women and also followed their false god of Baal. God became angry and punished them. 24,000 died by a plague.

“2 You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you. 3 Your eyes have seen what the Lord did at Baal Peor; for the Lord your God has destroyed from among you all the men who followed Baal of Peor.”

God had a reason for the ceremonial laws of cleanliness – they served as a curb to keep them from following false gods, and they always kept the Israelites aware of their need of spiritual cleansing through God's Word. So we hear in our Old Testament reading of the blessings of following God's Word.

“Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’

7 “For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the Lord our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? 8 And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?”

Why is the nation great? Because God is near to it. And God makes the people righteous through the coming of the Messiah. Through belief in the coming Messiah, Jesus, God pronounces His people righteous. They are judged clean!

He who has ears let him hear our verses from our Introit Psalm reading for today – Psalm 51.

“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me. 6 Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom. 7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Hyssop was used for the sprinkling of blood in the Jewish Passover. And it is symbolic of the cleansing by the blood of the Lamb – Jesus Christ!

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. 11 Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. 12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me by Your generous Spirit. 13 Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners shall be converted to You.”

And God alone creates a clean heart by the power of the Holy Spirit. Man cannot cleanse his or her heart. God doesn't cast us away from Himself because of our sin, but restores the joy of our salvation by His generous forgiving gracious Spirit!

This is the breastplate of righteousness that God gives to His people through faith – Christ's righteousness, as we heard in our Epistle reading from Ephesians 6. The Christian is given the helmet of salvation, the belt of truth, that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life – the salvation of all mankind.

And David quickly says, that having received a clean heart by the Holy Spirit, he then will teach other **“transgressors Your ways, And sinners shall be converted to You.”**

Indeed you and me, forgiven believers in Christ, **“having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace;”** as we walk with the Good News of God's peace in Jesus for all unbelieving and lost people.

This Good News we hear so often in God's Word. He who has ears let him hear the gracious truths of His Word.

“You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:11).

“He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5).

Through our baptism we receive this cleansing for life by the same Holy Spirit. And Jesus graciously invites us to eat and drink His very body and blood for our forgiveness today.

So, God tenderly invites you and me to know that your hearts are cleansed not by any outward washings or rituals or traditions of men...but by the washing of the blood of Jesus.

So, in heaven, how are the believers in Christ pictured? Listen to Revelation 7 once again:

“Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?”

14 And I said to him, “Sir, you know.”

So he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

So, listen believers in Jesus always to His Word which cleanses you and sets you apart as His special people, His royal priesthood, to proclaim His marvelous works. Each and every day we are invited by God to trust His promise from Hebrews 10:

**“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water”
(Hebrews 10:22, NKJV).**

Amen.

“And this peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)