

# “You Are Clean”

Mark 7:14-23

Our Gospel reading for today from Mark chapter 7 builds on what we heard last week, when we read the first part of the chapter. The Jewish leaders are upset because Jesus isn't following their traditions. Tradition can be very good, when it is the actual teaching or practicing what the Word of God has commanded. I will never give up the tradition of baptizing children in the church, nor will I give up the tradition of teaching my daughters to remember their Baptism – which is why we “traditionally” begin bedtime prayers with the Invocation (In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit) followed by the Apostle's Creed (the baptismal Creed).

However, the traditions that Jesus and the disciples were ignoring were, as Jesus put it, “Rules taught by men.” These “rules of men” were taught as if they were the Word of God. When God shows up, in the person of Jesus, as Jesus is God, He isn't concerned with keeping their rules.

So why does Jesus shift gears from His ministry of healing and performing miracles – showing Himself to be God? There is this complete shift. Last week, we heard about Jewish hand-washing rituals and

designating your property as “Corban” – given to God, so that you could keep it for yourself and you didn’t have to spend any of it helping your elderly parents. This week, it’s all about food. But then Jesus does explain what it is that actually defiles a person.

In next week’s Gospel, we are going to see why Jesus is focusing on these things. He is intentionally moving away from preaching to the Jews and will turn His attention to the Gentiles, who the Jews recognize as defiled, “unclean,” incapable of being clean. And Jesus comes to them, God has come to bring the cleanness that He has within Himself. He has come to bring it to everyone. You are clean.

Last week, Jesus shows the people that the Jewish tradition of “Corban” meant that God’s actual Law could not be kept. A person who had “given to God” his property, could not share it with his parents and honor them by caring for them in their old age. But this week, Jesus goes one step further and changes a commandment of God that actually did come from God. Jesus declares all foods to be clean. Bacon is now on the menu.

This is challenging for the Jews. This is challenging even for Jesus’ disciples. We read in the book of Acts that Peter, long after Jesus rose from the dead, was still proud of the fact that nothing unclean had ever passed his lips. Jesus, in a dream, three times shows him unclean animals and says, “Kill and eat.” Just then, messengers come from Cornelius, a Gentile, and Peter goes to preach to him and have table fellowship with him. It takes a while for Peter, and others, to understand life under the new covenant.

As the Lord says through Isaiah, you and I have no right to add to or subtract even a word from what God has said. Jesus has the authority to

change the ceremonial law of God, because He is the One who gave it in the first place. He is God. He has the right to say when this law has its completion. And the ceremonial law of the Old Testament, the dietary laws and sacrifices have their completion in Jesus.

Some laws are meant to last forever. The 10 Commandments will be in effect even after the resurrection, because they simply reflect the will of God. Those permanent laws also have their completion in Jesus, but in a different sense.

After I die and Jesus raises me from the dead, I will have no other God; I will use God's name only in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving; I will rejoice in the opportunity to worship God; I will honor God and all my brothers and sisters in Christ, including my father and mother; I will not kill; I will not commit adultery; I will not steal; I will not tell lies; I will not covet anything of yours. And for all eternity, I will have no desire to do anything against God's expressed will.

You and I will live forever in the complete, perfect cleanness of Christ's righteousness and holiness – dwelling in His presence forever. This is something we long for.

Back in Jerusalem, everybody is worried about eating without washing your hands in a certain manner, or only eating the right foods – and if you don't do this correctly, you will be unable to be in the presence of God. Jesus is about to tell them what really makes them unable to be in the presence of God. It isn't whether or not you have had a bath. It has to do with the state of your heart in regard to the faith of your Baptism.

The unbeliever will always see the law as the means by which he can purify himself, or at least elevate himself above others. Whereas the believer sees the law as God's desire for me to act in a way that is good for

my neighbor and provide me with the opportunity to offer God thank offerings for the forgiveness of sin which I have already received through the faith of my Baptism in the blood of Jesus on the cross.

What you eat or drink does not defile you. It enters your stomach. It does not enter your heart – your soul. It is what comes out of your mouth that defiles you. Elsewhere, Jesus says, “From the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks.” Evil thoughts become manifested in words and deeds. Jesus rattles through a whole list. Basically, He covers the 10 Commandments: theft, murder, adultery, coveting, envy, pride, slander, rejection of God which is the ultimate foolishness.

These things that spew out of your heart are the actual problem, and you are not going to fix it by washing your hands. Back in Jerusalem, the issue that Jesus is having with the people is the same issue that plagues our world today – very few people understand what sin actually is, how serious of a problem it is, and how it is what separates you from God.

Sin remains sin only where God remains God. What I mean is that when you no longer see God in His full and awesome majesty – holding authority over your life here and for all eternity; when you no longer see God as the One worthy of eternal praise from the saints and angels as we see in John’s Revelation; when God is just the “Big Guy in the Sky” or Jesus is just some long-haired, bearded face who is credited with a lot of quotes on Facebook or Instagram, it becomes a lot easier ignore Him.

It becomes a lot easier to start adding to or taking away from His words. His Word is truth. His Word is life. His Word is the way to salvation. His Word, joined with the water has made you clean, and you are clean. Amen.