

Sunday, July 22, 2018
Mister Clean
St. Giles' Presbyterian Church

Mark 7: 1-23

Good morning St. Giles'! It's so good to be with you again as we worship Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

This morning we'll be taking a look at Mark chapter 7. In this passage, we find Jesus and the disciples seemingly defending their actions against the Teachers of the Law.

On the surface, it may seem that this is an argument, one that stems from the disciples' choice in not washing their hands before a meal.

But, when we dig into the scriptures, we find that the argument that they are having is much more than just about having clean or unclean hands. We find that at the core of the argument, what is being debated has to do with the differences in the **WORLD VIEW** between the Teachers of the Law and with Jesus.

THIS worldview is fundamental in understanding the differences in the religion that the Teachers of the Law practiced during those days and to the teachings that Jesus was trying to impart on his disciples as he was preparing them to lead the brand new church that he was establishing.

This morning, we'll take a look at those fundamental differences and my hope is that WHAT we learn this morning will impact how we practice OUR FAITH in the world today.

But before we begin, let's start with a word of prayer.

PRAYER

Our Heavenly Father, we come into your presence today as a community of Faith. You are the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. Holy Spirit, we ask that you would be with us, that you would be among us, that you would speak to us this morning as we dig into your scriptures. Open the eyes of our hearts, so that we might see what you have to teach us. Open the ears of our hearts, so that we might be in tune with your Spirit. Transform our lives, Oh Lord, so that we might become the people of the resurrection. Help us to practice our Faith as a community of Christ so that the world may know who you are and that your transforming presence may bring peace to a world that desperately needs it. We pray for these things in your name. Amen.

Mr. Clean and our Obsession with Physical Cleanliness

Over the past three weeks, my family and I have been on a road trip.

[SLIDE: PHOTO OF ROAD TRIP]

We drove from Prince George to Kamloops. And after Kamloops we visited friends in Kelowna. And after Kelowna we spent a few days in Calgary and then Edmonton. We then went to Grande Prairie, Alberta. We were then supposed to go to Fort St. John to visit some friends but we had car troubles and instead we drove home from Grande Prairie back to Prince George.

After 3 weeks on the road, with four people in the car, you can imagine the state of our car especially with having a toddler and a three-month-old riding in the back seat!

This past week, I've taken the time to clean out both the interior and exterior of the car.

[SLIDE: Mr. Clean]

And in doing all of this, I've realized how much emphasis we place on being clean. Being CLEAN is an obsession in our society.

We have companies that offer everything from kitchen cleaners to household cleaners.

We have companies that offer you to buy a pass, giving you one car wash a day over a 90-day period.

In fact, our obsession with being clean is so great that there are reports that say that in 2016 the global household cleaning industry was valued at \$25.5 billion dollars and by 2022 it is projected that the global industry would be worth \$33 billion dollars.

In our world today, we have an obsession with being clean.

MARK 7: 1-23 – The Obsession with being clean in Jesus’ Day

Our obsession with being clean is nothing new. In fact, when we read the scriptures, we see that Jesus gets into a debate with the Teachers of the Law on this very subject.

At the very heart of the debate is this obsession on being clean.

In the debate that Jesus has with the Teachers of the Law, the core of “being clean” is one part [physical cleanliness] and one part [tradition].

In Mark chapter 7 verses 1- 5, we see that the author sets up this altercation between Jesus and the teachers of the law as the disciples are sitting down to eat a meal. In partaking of the meal, we’re told that the disciples DON’T wash their hands.

The scriptures says this:

The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus² and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. – Mark 7: 1-2

At first glance when we read this, it's no big deal. We think about our own lives and we say,

“Ok, sometimes I'll sit down to a meal and forget to wash my hands. No big deal, I use a fork and knife, or I use a pair of chopsticks. I don't actually touch the food with my hands, so it's ok for this one meal.”

And yes, our modern sensibilities tell us that washing our hands, although a good habit to have, is not a “must do”. By having this as part of our lives, there's already a bit of disconnect that happens between the scriptures and with our own experience.

If this passage were only about the physical act of washing our hands, it wouldn't be important enough for the author of Mark to record.

The reason is because the washing of hands in Jesus' day had a direct correlation between “being clean” and with “worship”.

The correlation stems all the way back to the laws that were given to the Israelite people by their great leader Moses. When Moses was given the Ten Commandments, he was also given the laws. The laws were designed so that the Israelite people knew HOW they ought to live.

In those laws, there was a section known as the cleanliness laws. In the book of Leviticus chapters 11-18, there is a whole section talking about the importance of being clean.

So, for example, the Cleanliness laws talk about certain kinds of food that are clean and that are unclean.

The Cleanliness laws talk about what to do about purification and how to become clean after childbirth.

The Cleanliness laws talk about regulations with regards to skin diseases

and having that kind of thing would make you unclean

and what to do with that.

The Cleanliness laws stretch from Leviticus chapters 11-18.

Eight chapters in Leviticus are dedicated to directing the people of Israel in what they need to do when they find themselves unclean. And so you can see how

important “being clean” would be to any practitioners of the Jewish faith.

When the Pharisees and the Teachers of the law saw that the disciples of Jesus didn't follow these laws to their satisfaction, they become offended and they confront Jesus and the disciples about it.

Jesus' Response

The interesting thing about this passage is HOW Jesus responds to the teachers of the law. We see that as the Pharisees question Jesus about his followers, the conversation goes like this:

[Pharisees]

“Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands? – Mark 7: 5

And Jesus responds by saying:

[Jesus]

“Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:

“These people honour me with their lips,

but their hearts are far from me.

⁷ They worship me in vain;

their teachings are merely human rules.’

⁸ You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions.”

– Mark 7: 6-8

When we read this confrontation, we see the heart and character of Christ. When confronted by the Teachers of the Law with the question of why his disciples didn't

observe the Cleanliness laws, Jesus doesn't respond with a snappy come back, but instead he goes straight to the scriptures.

In the passage that we read, Jesus quotes from Isaiah 29:13. And what Jesus says to the Teachers of the Law cuts straight to the heart. Using Isaiah chapter 29, Jesus points out to the Pharisees that the question that they ask about the disciples not washing their hands, is NOT about true worship. Instead, they are concerned with the outwards signs and symbols that surround worship. The washing of the hands, the washing of the pots and kettles are all outward symbols of their faith.

The symbols are designed to remind them of the importance of BEING CLEAN. But the symbols aren't the most important thing. What's important about worship isn't these outward symbols, but instead, it is about the heart of the person coming to worship God and being in right relationship with Him.

It's kind of like this. Alli's birthday is coming up in October. I could forget about it until the last minute,

and then suddenly remember,

and then go out haphazardly to the mall and buy her a sweater that she MIGHT like and some flowers from the store.

But is this what gift giving is all about?

OR do I take the time and think about what she might like or what she might need. Is there thought put into the gift? Do I live my life not really thinking about or caring about my wife? Or do I live in the present, where I love her, think about her, care for her, and serve her? And when there is a special day where I get to honour her, then I do it with the utmost sincerity and with the utmost care?

WORSHIPING God is like that. Is WORSHIP all about watching out for the traditions of the religion? In the case of the Pharisees, what did they care about? Did they care more about the religion, about the physical act of performing these rituals OR did they care about BEING in relationship with the one true God?

The Westminster Shorter Catechism gives us a clear picture in what our purpose is as human beings. It says this.

Q. 1. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

You see that? As God's people, our ultimate purpose is to be in relationship with him. We are to ENJOY him forever!

This is the kind of relationship that we can have with God!

Now, the Cleanliness Laws that were written in Leviticus, what was it's purpose?

It's purpose was to teach the Israelite nation, who had been slaves and captives in

Egypt for 400 hundred years, it was to teach the nation HOW TO LIVE in relationship with God.

In the Cleanliness laws, God recognizes that the people will become UNCLEAN. People will come in contact with dead animals, unclean foods, skin ailments, whatever and that the people WILL become unclean.

The Cleanliness Laws were given to the people so that they could CLEAN themselves SO THAT they could come into the presence of God and WORSHIP him. In other words, the Cleanliness Laws were designed so that the people could be in RELATIONSHIP WITH God.

But Jesus tells the Teachers of the Law that they've missed the point. You take MORE pride in the washing your hands and in the washing of pots and the washing of kettles and you DO NOT have a heart of WORSHIP. And so Jesus rebukes them.

AND There's More!

But the Heart of Worship is one thing. Twisting the laws in ways that they were not meant to be is an entirely different thing. The scriptures say this:

⁹And he continued, "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! ¹⁰For Moses said, 'Honour your father and mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.' ¹¹But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is Corban (that is, devoted to God)— ¹²then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother. ¹³Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that." - Mark 7:9-13

What is Jesus talking about here? What does Jesus mean when he says “you have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!”? And what does Jesus mean when he talks about Corban? What is happening here?

What Jesus is calling out is the complete misuse of the laws that were given to the people. Jesus points out that the intention of the law is for sons and daughters to honour the Father and Mother. This law was not in dispute. In fact this particular law is the FIFTH commandment that is laid out within the Ten Commandments. In Exodus 20: 12 it says this:

¹² “Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.” - Exodus 20:12

But look how the law is twisted in favour of the Teachers of the Law. Jesus says that the Pharisees have turned the law against itself.

¹¹ But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is Corban (that is, devoted to God)— ¹² then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother.” - Mark 7: 11-12

Corban, according to Biblical scholars is when you declare an offering or a sacrifice that is given back to God. Corban was meant to be a thanksgiving given by the Israelite people. By interpreting that the Corban offering be given to God is sacred, what the Teachers of the Law were saying was that anything that is offered to

Temple would then make it exempt from being given to the parents of the offering giver.

The people were being taught that this offering, this sacrifice was MORE IMPORTANT to God than actually taking care of their mothers and their fathers. In essence what was happening was that the older generation, those moms and dads who were in NEED and would have counted on their sons and daughters to provide for them in their old age, they were being neglected because of RELIGIOUS reasons.

And why was this happening? One Biblical scholar says that the reason for this was because the Teachers of the Law would be able to gather 10% of what was being offered to the Temple. The Pharisees were PROFITING off of this religious practice of CORBAN and the people who were suffering were the older generation.

Alli's sister was a lawyer who dealt with this kind of thing for a number of years in Vancouver. Elder Law is an area of law that helps to prepare and protect those who are vulnerable in the aging population. Elder abuse is something that is very real in our modern world AND it was happening in Jesus' day under the guise of religion.

Jesus, being confronted because his disciples were not washing their hands before meals was INDIGNANT, he was ANGRY because the Teachers of Law cared more about following their own traditions, rather than standing up and protecting the rights and interests of the aging Elder population.

It's no wonder Jesus quotes Isaiah 29 and tells them that HIS people, the Israelite nation that was SUPPOSED to be set apart in the world,

their PURPOSE was to point those who were lost to God,

BUT they had used the very RELIGION that was supposed to teach them how to live as a means to abuse the very people they were supposed to protect!

And so Jesus ends this altercation with the Pharisees by teaching the crowds that were around them.

Jesus says:

***'Listen to me, everyone, and understand this.¹⁵ Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them.'* – Mark 7: 15-16**

With regards to the cleanliness laws, what Jesus is saying here is that it's not about the things that we find in our environment that makes us "unclean". Rather, it's what inside of that person that comes out, that is what makes us "unclean".

CHARACTER

One of the greatest lessons that I have learned when with dealing with people is to keep quiet and observe. This is especially true with regards to people that I may have just met or people that I don't really know. And the reason for this is because when I am meeting people for the first time OR if I am getting to know someone

well, the more I observe or let people talk, the more information I can get about what kind of person I am dealing with.

Getting to know someone's character is very different from getting to know someone on the surface. Often times, on the surface, people try to give you the very best first impression. You might say to yourself, WOW! That person has EVERYTHING together. They drive a nice car. They live in the right neighbourhood. Their kids are so well behaved. Yet, often times, it's when the spot light ISN'T on a person that the true character of a person is revealed.

[SLIDE: Warren G. Harding]

The author Malcolm Gladwell, in his book called "Blink" talks about the "Warren Harding error". Warren Harding was the 29th American President and is widely regarded as one of America's worst.

Gladwell explains the reason for this is because Warren Harding was made to be the Republican Candidate solely because he "looked" like a President. He had the stature and the demeanour of a great politician. Yet, when given the chance to look at President's Harding's personal life, this couldn't be further than the truth. Time magazine called him one of the "Top 10 Forgettable Presidents" and described him this way -

Harding was an Ohio newspaper publisher who eventually rose to become U.S. Senator; he preferred poker, socializing and, it was said, womanizing to working. -

http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1879648,1879646_1879696,00.html

Malcolm Gladwell argues that as human beings we have the natural gift and ability to size up a situation and understand at a moment's notice what we are dealing with. However, there are instances when we look at something and be completely wrong about our assertions.

In the same way, the Teachers of the Law were concerned with what was happening on the outside, and more specifically, they were concerned with the washing of hands and the washing of kettles and pots before partaking in a meal. Their concern was with what was happening with the surface of a person.

With Jesus, his concern ran much deeper. His concern was more about what was happening at the core of the person.

The Lesson that Jesus teaches his disciple - the core of a person

The scriptures go on and tell us that Jesus leaves this argument, he leaves the crowds and he enters the house. There, his disciples like many times before, ask Jesus to explain his teaching. The passage says this:

¹⁷After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. ¹⁸'Are you so dull?' he asked. 'Don't you see that nothing that

enters a person from the outside can defile them? ¹⁹ For it doesn't go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body.' (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.)

²⁰ He went on: 'What comes out of a person is what defiles them. ²¹ For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come – sexual immorality, theft, murder, ²² adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. ²³ All these evils come from inside and defile a person.' – Mark 7: 17-23

When taking the time to explain this teaching to his disciples, Jesus does two things. The first thing that he does is declared that ALL foods are clean. Now what does that mean? It means that the food that we eat, whatever it is, it goes into the stomach. The body digests the food and uses the nutrients to nourish the body. And then the body takes whatever is left, whatever is not used to nourish the body, it purges it and it gets rid of it.

In declaring that all foods are clean, Jesus very clearly teaches us that it is not FOOD that makes us clean or unclean. Because food goes doesn't touch our hearts, but goes directly into our stomachs [and I'm going to quote Alyx here] and out the bum!

By declaring that all foods are clean, Jesus then is able to point out to his disciples that really, it's not what goes IN to a person makes them unclean, but instead what comes OUT of a person is what defiles them. You see, the Teachers of the Law were focused on the environmental factors that would make a person unclean and unfit to approach God.

Jesus on the other hand // was focused what is in us, those things that are buried deep inside us and hidden from the outside world. It is those things that keep us from truly being in worship and in relationship with God.

Those things Jesus lists off are

²¹ For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come – sexual immorality, theft, murder,²² adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly.²³ All these evils come from inside and defile a person.' – Mark 7: 21-23

Our Obsession with Cleanliness

I believe we live in a world that is at war against the concept of sin. We hear it often, don't we? People will say to us "don't judge me". Let me do what I want. I don't have to listen to anyone but myself. I'll live my life the way I want to live my life.

Sin is often put on the backburner. We rarely think about it. But what is the consequence of Sin? The consequence of sin is that it separates us; it keeps us apart from being in relationship with God. And that list that Jesus tells his disciples about, you know what? They all come from the same place. They all come from a person's heart, they all come from the inner being of people, they all come from the core of a person.

Now if that's the case, HOW on Earth do we become clean?

The answer goes back to the scriptures.

In the Cleanliness Laws that we find in Leviticus, we find a section there that talks about the Day of Atonement. The Day of Atonement is still celebrated today AND it is known as Yom Kippur.

In Leviticus chapter 16, it describes how Aaron, the high priest is to prepare himself to meet God in the most Holy Place. It's described that he must bathe and wash himself. He then must put on clean clothes, a clean tunic, clean undergarments, a clean sash, a clean turban,

these are his sacred clothes.

He is then to make offerings to God on behalf of the people.

After all of this is done, Leviticus says this:

20 "When Aaron has finished making atonement for the Most Holy Place, the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall bring forward the live goat. 21 He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat's head. He shall send the goat away into the wilderness in the care of someone appointed for the task. 22 The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a remote place; and the man shall release it in the wilderness. - Leviticus 16: 20-22

Do you see what is happening on the Day of Atonement? We're told that Aaron the high priest must prepare himself before meeting God. And why is he doing this? It is because he is to be the representative for the Israelite people. He is representing the entire nation before God. He is to ask for forgiveness for their sins, so that they

would be clean are able to stand in front of God. Being in right relationship with God was fundamental to their existence as a nation.

And all this preparing, the offerings and sacrifice of animals to God, what happens at the very end? We're told that a live goat is brought forward. Aaron is to place his hands on the head of the goat and confess their sins, and all the sins of the people would be transferred onto the goat. And we're told that the goat is to be taken into the wilderness and led out of the community.

Friends, when we read this passage of the Day of Atonement and when we read about this goat, this is where we where the term "scape goat" comes from.

This practice that we find in Leviticus is actually a hint of what things were to come for the Israelite Nation.

With Christ dying on the cross, all of our sins were placed on HIS head. In dying on the cross, Jesus BECAME our ultimate Scapegoat.

Jesus Christ - Ultimate Scapegoat

In our modern day society, we are obsessed with being clean. After coming back from our road trip, I was impressed with how many cleaning products were

available for cleaning. We have Windex, Armour All, Febreze. And the most famous of all cleaners is Mr. Clean.

But the ultimate Mister Clean is Jesus.

Jesus, the Son of God, CLEANED us of our sins.

In the same way that the scapegoat was used to atone for the sins of the Israelite Nation, the sins of the world were placed on the head of Jesus. It is through the blood of Christ that WE are cleansed from OUR sin.

And that's why Jesus was so indignant when he was debating the Teachers of the Law. The Teachers of the Law had taken the Laws and had twisted it for their own gain. They wanted people to give to the Temple in order that they could benefit. It was greed that led them to do this and no matter how much you washed your hands or the pots or the kettles, this kind of washing could not cleanse their hearts.

If we understand that Christ came to die for our sins in order that we would be cleansed, we would understand the sacrifice that he had to pay in order that we could come into the presence of God. Jesus paid the ultimate sacrifice by going to the cross in order to be our substitute.

It is through this understanding; this realization that we come to know how much God loves us. At the core of every person, WE are unclean. It is through Jesus, our scapegoat that we BECOME clean. AND it is BECAUSE of this we are able to come into the presence of God.

Friends, my hope and my prayer for all of us is this. That we would look towards Christ and come to know how much YOU are loved. In the eyes of God, we are all equal and we are all unclean. Yet, it is through Christ that we HAVE become clean and holy and presentable to God. In that we are called to be a community that points people to the only hope that we have. We are to point the world towards Jesus, showing them that it is through OUR Mister Clean that we can truly come and be in relationship with God.

Amen.