

#1791
Cf. #554 #1435

Mark 7:1-23¹

What is in a man's heart makes him unclean;
therefore, change the heart –
only through the Gospel.

15th Sunday after Pentecost

Supplementary Lectionary

Series "B," Gospels, adapted

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Grace WELS Durand MI
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Elders' & Boo Meeting

^{7:1} The Pharisees and some of the Teachers of the Law, who had come from Jerusalem, gathered around Jesus and ² saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were "unclean," that is, (ceremonially) unwashed. ³ (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless with the fist they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. ⁴ When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash [baptize].² And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing [baptizing]² of cups, pitchers, kettles and dining couches.)

⁵ So the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law asked Jesus, "Why do your disciples not live according to the Tradition of the Elders instead of eating their food with '[ceremonially] unclean' hands?"

⁶ [Jesus] replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:

"These people honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.

⁷ They worship me in vain;
their teachings are but rules taught by men' (Isaiah 19:13).

⁸ You have let go of the Commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men."

⁹ And [Jesus] said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the Commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! ¹⁰ For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother' (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16); and, 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must certainly be put to death' (Exodus 21:17; Leviticus 20:9). ¹¹ But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban' (that is, a gift/offering devoted to God), ¹² then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. ¹³ Thus you nullify the Word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that."

¹⁴ Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this.

¹⁵ Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him 'unclean.' ¹⁶ If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."

¹ *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984. All Scripture references are taken from this translation unless noted otherwise.

² The Greek vocable is a form of *baptivzw* [baptizo] – from which we get our word, baptism.

¹⁷ After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. ¹⁸ “Are you so dull?” he asked. “Do you not see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him ‘unclean’? ¹⁹ For it does not go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body.³ All foods are clean.”

²⁰ [Jesus] went on: “What comes out of a man is what makes him ‘unclean.’ ²¹ For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immoralities, thefts, murders, adulteries, ²² greedinesses, malices, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. ²³ All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean.’”

HOW TO DEAL WITH MANKIND’S UNCLEANNES

I. OUTWARD UNCLEANNES

II. INWARD UNCLEANNES

In the Name of Jesus who has forgiven all our sins, Dear Fellow-Redeemed,

Jesus was in Capernaum of Galilee. Capernaum was located on the northwest corner of the Sea of Galilee. News of Jesus’ preaching, teaching and miracles had spread throughout the land. So we hear in the first verse of our text, “The Pharisees and some of the Teachers of the Law ... had come from Jerusalem, [and] gathered around Jesus” (7:1).

The Pharisees were a sect of the Jews. The Teachers of the Law or Scribes were a separate group but some of them also belonged to the sect of the Pharisees. The Pharisees had added to God’s Old Testament Law something like 613 additional requirements that they said had to be rigorously followed in order to please God. So they came to Capernaum from Jerusalem in order to spy on Jesus and test him.

These Pharisees and Scribes (Teachers of the Law) came to Jesus not in order to listen and learn but to spy. Their motivation was malice, wickedness and evil intent. They wanted to catch Jesus in something so that they could accuse him and discredit him. They did not have long to wait for such an opportunity.

The issue with which the Pharisees and Scribes confronted Jesus was the matter of ceremonial uncleanness. They saw Jesus’ disciples eating with ceremonially unclean hands. So we look at the issue of HOW TO DEAL WITH MANKIND’S UNCLEANNES. HOW TO DEAL WITH MANKIND’S UNCLEANNES ... I. OUTWARD UNCLEANNES; and, II. INWARD UNCLEANNES.

HOW TO DEAL WITH MANKIND’S UNCLEANNES

I. OUTWARD UNCLEANNES

³ Literally, “and goes out into the latrine” or toilet.

These Pharisees and Scribes,

² saw some of [Jesus] disciples eating food with hands that were ‘unclean,’ that is, (ceremonially) unwashed.

.....
⁵ So the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law asked Jesus, ‘Why do your disciples not live according to the Tradition of the Elders instead of eating their food with ‘[ceremonially] unclean’ hands?’

This did not mean that the hands of Jesus’ disciples were literally dirty, grimy or filthy. It meant that they were not following the tradition of one of those 613 additional legal requirements that the Pharisees invented.

The tradition of washing their hands ceremonially is explained in detail.

³ (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless with the fist they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. ⁴ When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash [baptize]. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing [baptizing] of cups, pitchers, kettles and dining couches) [7:3,4].

These Pharisees and Scribes would take water in the palm of one hand, and with the fist of the other hand wash their palm and the back side of the hand and the wrist. Some describe this practice as extending all the way up to the elbow and upper arm. This was their required, legal “tradition.”

The practice of the Pharisees and Scribes had nothing to do with spiritual cleanliness. They thought they were doing a good work by which to please God. But Jesus’ rebuke of them indicates that they were actually sinning, because there was no repentance or faith in their hearts.

(Incidentally, Mark’s record of this event, contributes to a correct understanding of the term “baptism.” Mark records that when Pharisees and Scribes “come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash [baptize]. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing [baptizing] of cups, pitchers, kettles and dining couches” (7:4). Mark uses a form of the Greek Word βαπτίζω [baptizo] from which obviously we get our word “baptize.” Notice that Mark describes the Pharisees and Scribes as “washing or baptizing cups, pitchers, kettles and dining couches.” Obviously then, the term “baptize” cannot mean total immersion as some churches teach, for a person would not totally immerse a dining couch, nor, in some cases, even a kettle or pitcher.)

These Pharisees and Scribes, however, were not interested in any inward aspect of uncleanness. They were concerned with outward aspects of their law – their 613 additions to what God’s Word said.

APPLICATION

Now there is an easy answer to outward uncleanness: Soap and water. Did you take a bath last night or a shower this morning? Did you use soap and water? Then you are outwardly clean. Being outwardly clean is an important aspect of body hygiene. Take a bath or shower. Use soap and water. Brush your teeth. Comb your hair. These activities, however, do nothing for your being clean inwardly. Therefore, we return to the issue: HOW TO DEAL WITH MANKIND'S UNCLEANNES. There is ... I. OUTWARD UNCLEANNES; but there is also ... II. INWARD UNCLEANNES.

HOW TO DEAL WITH MANKIND'S UNCLEANNES II. INWARD UNCLEANNES

In spite of their outward cleanliness, these Pharisees and Scribes were inwardly unclean. This obviously is the case as we examine their activity more closely.

The Pharisees and Scribes had come down from Jerusalem to Capernaum in order to spy on Jesus. They had not come to listen and learn. They came with wickedness and malice in their hearts. They were looking for something with which they might accuse Jesus. So they focus on Jesus' disciples' violation of one of their 613 rules and regulations added to what the Bible said.

It was a rule for these Pharisees and Scribes to go through their ceremonial washing when they returned from the market place or any public location. They also had their rules about washing, baptizing, utensils, cups, plates, pitchers, pots, pans and dining couches – obviously then not totally immersing them. They followed rules and regulations for outward cleansings. But their hearts inside were unclean.

The hearts of the Pharisees and Scribes were unclean. Thus, Jesus calls them "hypocrites." They were acting like they were god-fearing and god-pleasing, but they were not. They actually broke God's Holy Law while observing their own 613 rules. Jesus illustrates this.

Jesus says,

⁶ ... ***"Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:***

***"These people honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.***

⁷ ***They worship me in vain;
their teachings are but rules taught by men' (Isaiah 19:13).***

⁸ ***You have let go of the Commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men."***

⁹ ***And [Jesus] said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the Commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! ¹⁰ For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother' (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16); and, 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must certainly be put to death' (Exodus 21:17;***

Leviticus 20:9). ¹¹ But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: ‘Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban’ (that is, a gift/offering devoted to God), ¹² then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. ¹³ Thus you nullify the Word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that” (7:6-13).

According to the Pharisees, if a man wanted to get out of the responsibility of helping his father or mother in their old age and need, all he had to do was say “Corban” regarding any money or other help he might give to his parents. The word “Corban” means a gift devoted to God – a freewill gift or offering. But, that designated as “Corban” did not even have to be transferred to the Temple. The person could still hold on to the gift, use it as he desired, but not support his parents. Thus, the Pharisees were nullifying God’s Word which stated in the Fourth Commandment, “Honor your father and your mother”; and which stated that those who did not honor their father or their mother should be put to death. Jesus, therefore, exposes the sinful and unclean hearts of these Pharisees and Scribes. Jesus continues to explain both to the crowds and to his disciples the real meaning of uncleanness.

Jesus tells the crowd,

¹⁴ ... “Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. ¹⁵ Nothing outside a man can make him ‘unclean’ by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him ‘unclean.’ ¹⁶ If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear” (7:14-16).

Jesus’ disciples do not quite get the point.

¹⁷ After [Jesus] had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. ¹⁸ “Are you so dull?” he asked. “Do you not see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him ‘unclean’? ¹⁹ For it does not go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body. All foods are clean” (7:17-19).

Foods are eaten by the mouth and go into the stomach and later, what is left, goes into the toilet. By stating that “all foods are clean,” Jesus is indicating that he had come to fulfill all of the Old Testament Law and to do away with it. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law (cf. Romans 10:4). Thus, St. Paul would write to the Colossians,

¹⁶ ... do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. ¹⁸ Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. ¹⁹ He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole

body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

²⁰ Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: ²¹ “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? (Colossians 2:16-21).

The observance of such outward rules and regulations do not make a person clean inwardly. What comes from within a person is uncleanness.

²⁰ [Jesus] went on: “What comes out of a man is what makes him ‘unclean.’ ²¹ For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immoralities, thefts, murders, adulteries, ²² greedinesses, malices, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. ²³ All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean’” (7:20-23).

It is what comes out of the heart of mankind – the sinful, wicked heart – that makes a person unclean.

APPROPRIATION

Thus, Jesus exposes our sinful hearts. The sinful heart of mankind, the depravity of all people, is clearly taught in the Scriptures. St. Paul wrote to the Romans,

¹⁰ As it is written:

“There is no one righteous, not even one;

**¹¹ there is no one who understands,
no one who seeks God.**

**¹² All have turned away,
they have together become worthless;
there is no one who does good,
not even one.”**

**¹³ “Their throats are open graves;
their tongues practice deceit.”**

“The poison of vipers is on their lips.”

¹⁴ “Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.”

¹⁵ “Their feet are swift to shed blood;

¹⁶ ruin and misery mark their ways,

¹⁷ and the way of peace they do not know.”

¹⁸ “There is no fear of God before their eyes”

(Romans 3:10-18).

The fact that St. Paul begins with the words “As it is written,” indicates that he is quoting from various Old Testament sources. There has been no change in the heart of mankind since Adam and Eve fell into sin.

Mankind is by nature sinful and unclean. King David revealed this in his confession, “Surely I was sinful from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:5). God

revealed this truth before and after the flood. Before the flood, “The LORD saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time” (Genesis 6:5). After the flood, God saw that “every inclination of [mankind’s] heart is evil from childhood” (Genesis 8:21b). Thus, the Bible testifies to the universal uncleanness and depravity of all people. That this applies also to babies is seen in the fact that babies too are under the penalty of the results of sin. That penalty is death.

St. Paul writes, again to the Romans, “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23a). Where there is death there is sin. “Sin entered the world through one man [Adam, and Eve], and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12). Sin is the absence of perfection and holiness. This absence of perfection and holiness is true of all people – every man, woman, child, baby, unborn baby in the womb. All are subject to death. All are in danger of dying from the moment of conception. The reason for this is sin. Ceremonial washings, soap and water, baths and showers, will not solve this uncleanness of the heart. God has the only solution to this uncleanness of the heart.

Through the Old Testament Prophet Ezekiel, God said, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you” (Ezekiel 36:26&27a). Thus, King David cries out in Psalm 51, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10). God creates a new heart and a new spirit in a person. He does this through the Holy Spirit.

But how does the Holy Spirit create a clean heart and a right spirit within a person? You know the answer: Through the Gospel in Word and Sacraments. Through the Gospel or Good News in the Word, God speaks about how the holiness, perfection, righteousness and sinlessness of his Son has been credited to all people. St. Paul wrote, “God made him [Jesus] who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Through the Gospel or Good News in the Word, God speaks about how Jesus is the sacrifice of atonement on the cross to take away the sins of the world (cf. 1 John 2:1b&2). Through the Gospel in Holy Baptism – “the washing with water through the Word” (Ephesians 5:26b) – God the Holy Spirit creates in a person – child as well as adult – a new and clean heart. Through the Gospel in Holy Communion, God the Holy Spirit strengthens that new and clean heart that is in the Christian, giving and proclaiming again and again the forgiveness of sins by faith in Jesus.

Yes, the Christian, you and I, still has to struggle with that unclean heart that is in us – with our Old Adam – our sinful nature. We still become guilty of the things about which Jesus spoke in our text:

²⁰ ... **“What comes out of a man is what makes him ‘unclean.’** ²¹ **For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immoralities, thefts, murders, adulteries,** ²² **greedinesses, malices, deceit, lewdness, envy,**

slander, arrogance and folly. ²³ All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean' (7:20-23).

Jesus is the only answer to our spiritual uncleanness. He has given to us the forgiveness of sins through the Gospel. The Holy Spirit has taken residence in our hearts through the Gospel. The battle between our sinful nature and the new man created in us by the Gospel, will continue until we die. Our new man is guaranteed to win that battle through the forgiveness of sins we have in Jesus.

CONCLUSION

Do you want a clean heart? Oh, yes! But you and I cannot obtain a clean heart – a spiritually clean heart – on our own. No outward works such as ceremonial cleansings will do the job. No good works, effort, or merit will earn for us a clean heart. But the work of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of Jesus, cleanses us from sin, gives us a new and clean heart, and motivates in us godly thoughts, words, actions, attitudes and behavior. The daily struggle between our sinful nature and our new man created in us in Christ Jesus will continue. But the victory over sin, death and hell is ours eternally through our dear LORD Jesus Christ. Amen.