PENN CENTRAL CONFERENCE

A Message from PCC

August 28, 2024

Greetings Penn Central members and friends,

"There is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile." (Mark 7:15, NRSV)

Standing in line at a local grocery store years ago I picked up a small apple pie to have with my lunch. A woman in line behind me said, "You're not going to actually eat that, are you?" Clearly there was something wrong with me if I did. This wasn't the only time. I've been questioned on the source of my meat and dairy choices, whether I buy organic or non-GMO, and if I understand that Diet Coke is the equivalent of rat poison. Many people have many opinions on the many ways food can defile me. I start my reflection here lest we imagine that this week's lectionary passage from the gospel of Mark doesn't apply to us in the here and now.

The Pharisees question Jesus about his disciples' eating practice - why are the disciples not washing their hands before eating? Some clarification is in order. The condition of washing hands before eating was only for priests (prior to offering sacrifice). But the Pharisees took priestly practices and expanded them into the lives of the laity - a move that could draw the laity into participation in the life of the temple in a meaningful way. (This becomes critical after the destruction of the temple because the priests were gone and the rabbis continued this practice, thus keeping temple life alive.) Therefore, washing hands prior to eating was not a requirement for Jesus' disciples although the Pharisees believed it should be.

Jesus was more of a minimalist when it came to practices for the laity and this interaction provides him a moment to teach his disciples about where true defilement comes from.

He reminds them that avarice, envy, slander, pride (and the other awful things in Mark 7:21-23) originate inside of our hearts and are the states of mind and behaviors that defile us. That is, they mar, corrode, or deeply damage the God-given purity and holiness within us. They

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Prayers for Penn Central Conference

Ephesians 6:18 (NLT)

Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.

This week, we pray for each other as we continue to live into God's calling...

Faith UCC, Ickesburg

Pleasant Hill UCC, Jonestown

St. John's UCC, Jonestown

Church of the Apostles UCC, Lancaster



also wreak havoc or destroy our relationships with others. Jesus' list of evils is intense – it represents the very worst we can do. His word is a stark truth for the disciples: do not focus on these small practices such as handwashing when the potential for true, devastating defilement is already within you. Focus instead on what is in your own heart.

Those who criticize my eating choices also seek a kind of purity. They believe that what they put into their bodies (or where they do their shopping, etc.) can keep them pure in some way. I understand the temptation. Jesus does too. Focusing on small practices can ease our minds and help us feel that we are good people. But Jesus never encourages the easy way. Instead, he pushes disciples (us) to delve into our own hearts. Look closely. What is brewing there? Think not about what your neighbor is doing or saying. Keep the focus on your own heart. What intentions are brewing there? What prejudices are ensconced? What resentments are nurtured?

Jesus' teaching reminds me of words from the psalmist: *"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any hurtful way in me and lead me in the way everlasting"* (Psalm 139:23-24). May we each have the courage to look within.

Peace,

Carrie

Rev. Dr. Carrie Call

Conference Minister

Penn Central Conference