

Sunday Lesson – August 29, 2021

GOSPEL: Mark 7: 1-8; 14-15; 21-23

“The Source of Your Pollution”

Context

“In this text, Jesus addresses three different audiences: a group of Pharisees and scribes who raise the question of defilement, the crowd that is perpetually present, and the disciples who, true to character in Mark’s Gospel, don’t understand.

The message is delivered differently to each of these groups, but its essence is the same: our very selves are defiled, made unholy, not by what we take in, but by the corrosion of the human heart. Jesus’ three different versions of this message build on one another, thus enabling a fuller understanding of what is at stake: we must prepare our hearts, and thereby our selves, for the kingdom of God. This requires not worrying over what we “eat,” but how.” *(Excerpts from*

workingpreacher.org/commentaries/reviced-common-lectionary/ordinary-22-2/commentary-on-mark-71-8-14-15-21-23-4)

Insight

“A number of the sins that Jesus lists are direct violations of the Ten Commandments (adultery, sexual sins, murders, thefts, covetings, blasphemy). The others are rooted in the teachings of the Old Testament. Jesus continues to insist on redirecting the concerns of these Pharisees and scribes away from the authority of their traditions and back to the authority of scripture.

In a time and place where people emphasize piety (honoring God by fulfillment of religious duties), Jesus changes the emphasis to ethical behavior (honoring God by right actions in relationship to other people). He teaches us to be especially mindful of thoughts and feelings that give rise to unethical behavior in our relationships with family, friends and neighbors.



It is those thoughts and feelings, conceived and nurtured in our hearts that give rise to truly serious sins (Matthew 5:28).

This is an important word for us to hear today. We live in a culture that honors that which comes from within the human heart—that gives us permission to act on our feelings instead of bringing them under control.” *(Excerpts sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary-old/mark-71-23/)*

Gospel Reading

“7 1-8The Pharisees, along with some religion scholars who had come from Jerusalem, gathered around him. They noticed that some of his disciples weren’t being careful with ritual washings before meals. The Pharisees—Jews in general, in fact—would never eat a meal without going through the motions of a ritual hand-washing, with an especially vigorous scrubbing if they had just come from the market (to say nothing of the scourings they’d give jugs and pots and pans). The Pharisees and religion scholars asked, “Why do your disciples brush off the rules, showing up at meals without washing their hands?” Jesus answered, “Isaiah was right about frauds like you, hit the bull’s-eye in fact:

These people make a big show of saying the right thing,
but their heart isn’t in it.

They act like they are worshiping me,
but they don’t mean it.

They just use me as a cover
for teaching whatever suits their fancy,
Ditching God’s command
and taking up the latest fads.”

14-15 Jesus called the crowd together again and said, “Listen now, all of you—take this to heart. It’s not what you swallow that pollutes your life; it’s what you vomit—that’s the real pollution.”

20-23 He went on: “It’s what comes out of a person that pollutes: obscenities, lusts, thefts, murders, adulteries, greed, depravity, deceptive dealings, carousing, mean looks, slander,

arrogance, foolishness—all these are vomit from the heart. *There* is the source of your pollution.” The Message

What It Could Mean?

“Jesus explains where evil comes from. It comes from within all those people who bug you. But also from within you. Me, too.

Of course, it takes a while for Jesus to get to that basic point in this tongue-lashing delivered to a group of Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem. Their exchange begins with a question to Jesus about traditions, particular interpretations of laws given through Moses.

In verses 6b-7 Jesus cites the Greek version of Isaiah 29:13. In no way does Jesus deny the validity of either the Mosaic law in general or its individual commandments; he rejects how certain interpretations—and thus, certain practices—may have deviated from or obscured the intent of laws meant to safeguard purity.

The reference to Isaiah 29:13 introduces a contrast between the lips/mouth and the heart, and Jesus builds on this contrast to transform the issue into one about defilement and how a human body becomes polluted. Simply put, impurity is a matter of the heart, not the mouth.

What Jesus does *not* say

Despite the radical nature of verse 15a, “there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile,” we have no evidence that Jesus himself disregarded the dietary laws. (Notice Peter’s practice according to Acts 10:14.) Instead, Mark 7:1-23 speaks much more plainly about the *source* of defilement: it’s more internal than external. It’s more about who you are than about the foods or filth you avoid.

To be clear, Jesus does not dismiss the issue of defilement as insignificant. He reasserts the law’s basic concern to be about restraining evil and avoiding defilement. Yet here’s the problem for us human beings: evil and defilement stem from places rather deeply embedded within our very selves.

Jesus does not denounce the heart for producing *only* evil intentions. Believe in total depravity if you must, but I still think it’s worth underscoring that people are occasionally capable of great good and selfless compassion.

Second, remember: it’s not the scribes. Not the Pharisees. Not the law. What Jesus subjects to fiercest criticism in this passage is *the human being*.

Third, Jesus’ comments propel us to keep *our* evils in the spotlight. Whatever Satan is in Mark’s Gospel, it is not the cause of wrongdoing. That job belongs to the human heart. Placing blame on a diabolical entity lurking in the shadows risks diverting attention from our own propensity to rebel and destroy. Truly “evil intentions” dwell, not only within society’s notorious figures, but within ourselves and those we love and trust most fervently.

Fourth, we must direct a congregation toward the love and mercy God nevertheless extends to each and every broken *anthrōpos*.” (Excerpts from *workingpreacher.org*; Revised Common Lectionary by Matt Skinner)

Readings for Further Study

- [Deuteronomy 21:20/Proverbs 23:2/2 Peter 1: 5-7/2 Timothy 3: 1-9/2 Corinthians 10:5](#) *We are to control our “appetites”*

Thought for the Day

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.” ~ *Psalms 51:10 New Revised Standard Edition*

A Prayer

“Loving Father, I want my heart to be completely free to love You, Who are Love itself. Give me a heart free of self absorption, that I might know and love Christ in every person I meet. Give me a heart brimming with joy and peace, that remains firmly rooted in You, no matter my circumstances.”
Amen. (From prayerist.com/prayer/apureheart.html)