

Weekend of Sunday, September 2, 2018
15th Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 22/Proper 17/Year B
Primary Text: Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23
Sermon Title: “I Am the Bread of Life”

Theme

Mark’s gospel depicts Jesus as challenging traditional ways in which religious people determine what is pure or impure. For Jesus, the observance of religious practices cannot become a substitute for godly words or deeds that spring from a faithful heart.

Text

¹Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around [Jesus], ²they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. ³(For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; ⁴and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.) ⁵So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?” ⁶He said to them, “Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written,

‘This people honors me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me;
⁷in vain do they worship me,
teaching human precepts as doctrines.’

⁸You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.”

¹⁴Then he called the crowd again and said to them, “Listen to me, all of you, and understand: ¹⁵there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.”

²¹For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, ²²adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. ²³All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

Sermon

God's plan to use Moses was a tapestry of unusual events to be sure, but once God revealed himself to Moses, Moses was all in. In the First Reading, Moses was addressing the Israelites, repeating the words the LORD had given him to say to them as they stood on the banks of the Jordan River overlooking the Promised Land. The LORD God used Moses as a vessel and poured in these words, and I paraphrase, "After you cross over to the land I have provided for you, you will have some battles to fight, but I will lead you into victory if you just remain faithful. And about being faithful, I have given you some statutes, ordinances and commandments to follow. I give them to you because I love you and want the best for you. And by living disciplined God-honoring lives you will be my ambassadors to all the nations of the world, drawing all creation to myself."

You may recall that Joshua repeated those words in last week's First Reading and about that disciplined God-honoring life, Joshua said, "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

On this Labor Day weekend, let it be said that this is the labor of the faithful disciple of the LORD.

But then in the Gospel Reading, Jesus might seem to refute that admonition.

You heard the story, some religious professionals observed Jesus and his disciples eating with unclean hands and they asked him why they do that, not observing the "tradition of the elders." Well, to the casual disciple it might appear that in Jesus' explanation, he is giving permission to break the rules.

Not true. Jesus' point was that there is a difference between the statutes, ordinances, and commandments of God and these "traditions of the elders," which religious professionals have heaped on to the lives of their subjects. It's not that difficult for me to wash my hands before I eat, but it is a different story for the roofers who were working on my neighbor's house this week. Do you understand what Jesus was saying? The "traditions of the elders" to Jesus just seemed like unnecessary burdens put on people who can least likely abide by them.

Jesus further taught them that 1) there is a difference between the statutes, ordinances, and commandments of his Father, and the traditions of the elders, and 2) that the important thing is not what goes into the body (for example, food eaten with unwashed hands) but what comes out, which is born in the heart.

This teaching is not about doody, excrement, that which exits the body and ends up in the sewer, if you know what I am saying, but about the entire output of our being, excluding doody. Put another way, if you were put on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict?

Moving to the Second Reading, James also wrote words of instruction to his readers. He told them both what *to* do and what *not to* do. And in his final exhortation he said, ²²"be doers of the word, and not merely hearers."

And had James expanded his list of what *to* do, he might have expressed them as the Seven Faith Practices. And over the next seven weeks we are going to go a little deeper into each of the Seven Faith Practices. Don't know what I am talking about? I'll clear it all up over the next seven weeks, but in a nutshell, the Seven Faith Practices are seven manifestations of the life of discipleship. They are

- Pray
- Study
- Worship
- Invite
- Encourage
- Give
- Serve

All verbs, all action words because being a disciple of God revealed in Jesus Christ is defined by action.

Not one of these Seven Faith Practices is more important than another, and the faithful disciple cannot pick and choose which ones to do – all are equally important. Having said that, God in God's creative genius, created each of us differently with different gifts and abilities, so it is likely that any given disciples

will emphasize one or two more than others. But I repeat, we don't get to pick and choose which ones we want to do, all are equally important.

Over the next seven weeks I will begin each week with scriptural support and explanation, and then leaders from each of the Seven Faith Practice Tables will join me to discuss what their Tables do specifically and how you can join them in it. All that begins next week with the Study Table appropriately enough, so look forward to that.

You know, I think that it is a God-thing that we have these readings this Labor Day weekend, as we

- celebrate the blessing of the ability to use our God-given talents to work and provide for our families,
- and next weekend on "God's Work Our Hands Day of Service" we celebrate the blessing of our health and well-being to be a blessing to others doing "God's Work with Our Hands,"
- and today we also celebrate a sort of introduction to our study of the Seven Faith Practices, that officially begins next weekend.

It is a blessing that we have been given much and for that we should give thanks not only with offerings of money, and words, and singing praises, but with the using of these Seven Faith Practices as the way we live out our lives of faith. It is the labor of the faithful disciple of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

In the First Readings, in a speech to the Israelites Moses reminded the Israelites that God has given them statutes, ordinances, and commandments that they are to memorize, observe, and teach to their children.

After they enter the land there will be battles to be fought to take possession of the land, there will be homes to be built, there will be families to provide for. It will be labor, but that will not be their primary labor. Their primary labor will be to honor God by keeping the statutes, ordinances, and commandments God has given them. If they do that, their lives will be well-ordered and they will be blessed.

In the Gospel Reading, Jesus Christ our Lord said that in all our labors we should not lose sight of the One we try to honor in the living of our days.

And it could be argued that James said the same thing, when in the Second Reading, when he wrote that disciples of Jesus Christ are to be "doers of the word, and not merely hearers". I don't know what more I need to add to that as your encouragement this week.

As we celebrate this Labor Day weekend, let us meditate on our Lord's words and tend to our hearts from which all our true intentions come. Pray that God purge us of every unclean and ungodly thing, and that God's Spirit would replace those things with the Seven Faith Practices so that we too might honor God fully and wholly all the days of our lives.

Prayer

Loving God, who never stops laboring on our behalf, we give you thanks for Moses, and James who wrote words of encouragement for how we are to labor as faithful disciples. And more importantly we give you thanks for the example you give us of the godly life, Jesus Christ, our Lord. As we prepare to begin a new program year, we pray that your Spirit would re-double its efforts in leading and guiding us in the way we should go, that all we do brings you glory and honor.
Amen