

“From the Heart”

Scripture: Mark 7:1-8, 14-23

Graphics: heart, food, hand-washing,

Big Truth: The people of the PUMC are called to be devoted to God and God’s Word, not tradition or any external piety alone. Being devoted to God stops the evil that comes from us and lets love be our main characteristic.

Focus Phrase: Give us clean hands, and give us pure hearts.

1. Introduction

- A. I thank Pastor Suzanne for preaching last week while Stacy and I were on vacation. It’s always great to get away, but also good to be home with you all!
- B. When I asked Suzanne on what scripture she would preach, she told me Mark 8:34. If you were here or tuning in online, you’ll recall that Mark 8:34 says this, “Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” It’s not about you or me or us...it’s about (who?) Jesus.
- C. I love how the Holy Spirit works in all this, because starting this week - well, last week, actually - we’re beginning an extended journey through the middle section of the gospel of Mark. So, from now until the end of October, we’ll be walking carefully and deeply through Mark 7 through Mark 12.
- D. And, really, the whole point of the book of Mark is to move the Gentile believers in the early church to full faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. And when Jesus said, “...deny yourself and take up your cross and follow me...” he wasn’t just talking to the 1st-century Christians or would-be followers. He was talking to you and to me through a guy named Mark.
- E. Mark starts his gospel by telling us about John the Baptizer, then Jesus’ baptism, and then the calling of the 12 Disciples. He quickly shifts to Jesus healing, and forgiving, and teaching in and around the Sea of Galilee. As you can imagine, all of the things Jesus was doing started to draw the attention of crowds of people who were witnesses to all He’d done.
- F. It also grabbed the attention of the Jewish religious leaders in the area...and they weren’t sure what to think. The crowds of non-Jewish people don’t really care what the Pharisees and scribes have to say. But, Jesus was Jewish, so He did some confronting of their questions and anger.
- G. By the time we get to Mark 6, Jesus was performing amazing miracles - walking on water, feeding 5,000+ people, teaching amazing things with **authority**.
- H. Yet, it was exactly that authority that the religious leaders from Jerusalem decided was a threat to their way of thinking...their sense of who God was and what He wanted them to be doing.

- I. We pick up the narrative in Mark chapter 7 this morning. As we walk through Mark, let me encourage you to have your bible with you. We will be reading larger portions of scripture some weeks...so spend time reading and re-reading these sections.
- J. The Word of God is life...and the One who brings it life is named Jesus. He is our all-in-all and our focus in worship and life.
- K. Let's pray and then we'll dive into this section of Mark...
- L. **PRAY!**
- M. Open your bible to Mark 7...if you forgot yours today, there's one near you or in front of you or under your seat.
- N. We open the bible to read in worship because without THIS, we have nothing but our own thoughts and ideas. Our purpose for today and every time we open THIS is to be transformed by Jesus' words and Jesus' teachings.

2. Scripture

A. READ Mark 7:1-8

- i. Jesus then went on and pounded the Pharisees and scribes a little more by pointing out that they, in fact, are the ones not honoring God's commands.
- ii. But as this scene unfolds, Jesus gets this question - challenge, really - from the Pharisees about the fact that His disciples aren't ceremonially washing their hands, food, cups, bowls, etc. before they eat.
- iii. Here's what the 'high-scholarly' source Wikipedia has to say about this washing tradition: "According to *halakha* or custom, the hands are washed on a number of occasions. These include before and after eating a meal with bread; upon awaking in the morning; after using the toilet; before eating karpas in the Passover seder; and before prayer. On some of these occasions, the water must be poured from a cup; on others, it may also be delivered by any means such as a faucet. On some of these occasions, a blessing is recited; on others, it is not."
- iv. Apparently, the disciples and Jesus weren't doing everything just like they were supposed to...and the Pharisees noticed and didn't like it.
- v. Really, though, their question was less about washing hands, and more about what **authority** Jesus had to teach something OTHER than the tradition - the *halakha* - of the Jewish Torah.
- vi. It's interesting that in the middle of that section we read, Mark added a parenthetical statement as an aside to the Gentile readers. Those Gentile readers - those non-Jewish readers - wouldn't know what the fuss was about. Mark explained that washing was part of the tradition of the religious culture...and that gave them more insight.

- vii. I'm thankful that's there because, as Gentiles (which we are), we too have some insight into something from a different culture and time that we wouldn't know otherwise.
- viii. Jesus' RESPONSE to the Pharisees, however, was pretty pointed and quite harsh: He called them hypocrites (a person who puts on a false appearance of virtue or religion) and then quoted from Isaiah 29:13, "'This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.'"
- ix. **It's NOT about the tradition**, Jesus said! It's NOT about the things we DO in worship OTHER THAN the fact that we're focused on Him!
- x. One of the things I love about leading this church is that we're not stuck in tradition for the sake of tradition. We HONOR the traditions that point us to Jesus, but we don't just do things because we've always done them.
- xi. COVID has taught us that traditions are not the thing...some are important...some are priorities. We had to do just about everything differently. But, we do all we do to grow as disciples in worship, community, openness, obeying, serving, and sharing - our Intentional Discipleship Process.
- xii. So, the challenge from the Pharisees was batted back like a badminton shuttlecock in the Olympics.
- xiii. And then Jesus gave us more to chew on in verse 14...he called the crowd in to listen to His teaching...let's listen in with them...

B. READ Mark 7:14-23

- i. As Jesus called the crowd together, the Pharisees and scribes were still listening, no doubt.
- ii. Jesus said, "...there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile."
- iii. Then, alone with the disciples, his guys asked, "What does it mean, Jesus?"
- iv. Jesus did a bit of a facepalm and had to explain it to them.
 - a. Look, what goes INTO the mouth/body like food or drink or anything else isn't what defiles a person. Those things go into the stomach and then out to the sewer (don't you just love the bible?).
 - b. Those things don't go into the heart...
 - c. But what comes OUT FROM the heart - and then he listed out a whole laundry list of evils - fornication (sex outside of marriage), theft, murder, adultery, avarice (which is greed for wealth), wickedness, deceit, licentiousness (which is promiscuous sexual behavior), envy, slander, pride, and folly - THESE are all the things that the 10 Commandments

try to address...things that God knows will not only hurt US, but hurt those AROUND us.

- d. Jesus warned the disciples, the crowd, the Pharisees, and US, that it's not what goes INTO our bodies or the fact that we don't clean our hands and food before we eat it that hurts us...but what comes out of our hearts that makes us evil...defiles us and the world.
 - v. Now, as I read this section, I'm concerned that I find myself, at first, agreeing with the Pharisees and not Jesus. Anyone else get that little niggling feeling?
 - vi. Think about the last 18 months. What's the ONE thing that we've all had drilled into our heads more than anything else: WASH YOUR HANDS!
 - vii. We've been told that since the very beginning of our lives. Every time Mom called us in for supper, she'd ask, "Did you (what?) WASH YOUR HANDS?" And when you said, "Yes!" she'd ask, "with soap!?"
 - viii. The Pharisees understood the importance of washing one's hands.
- C. Jesus had it wrong (can we even say that?) - or so it would seem: "There is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile."
- i. Are you kidding me, Jesus? In terms of basic pathology, we know that this simply isn't true. Airborne viruses and bacteria introduced by our hands to our mouth or eyes can introduce disease from "outside a person" and "defile" our insides. In other words, apart from diseases that may be genetically inherited, disease visits us through the germs we inhale, bodily fluids we exchange with someone else, the smoke we breathe, the toxins we ingest and so on.
 - ii. Did Jesus really not KNOW this? I mean, he created us, right?
- D. Well, you know I don't really disagree with Jesus, do you? Nope.
- E. So, Jesus must have something greater in mind than simple clean hands.
- F. See, the Pharisees thought that if their hands were clean, i.e., if they did everything that tradition and the Mosaic law required, then God would consider them righteous.
- G. Jesus said it wasn't a question of the **hands**, but of the **heart**. **If your heart is pure, then your hands will be pure also.** If your heart is evil, your hands will be evil. What defiles you is that which comes from within you, from your heart, from your very essence and nature.

3. Application

- A. Let's see if we can get some practical application for Jesus' teaching today. If what comes FROM THE HEART is the key to holiness and purity, then what is it you and I need to be doing and praying about:
- i. First, **Be devoted to God and not tradition.**
 - a. Traditions can help you regularly practice the presence of God in worship and prayer. But when those traditions are the focus of your faith, then there's a danger of practicing outward piety and not ignoring inward devotion to God.
 - b. Why do you come to worship? Is it to show others that you're a good Methodist by going through the motions? Or is it because this is where we, together, lift up our voices to praise God and worship Him? Is it because it's what you've always done, or is it because God is worthy of your worship?
 - c. To take a cue from last week: Is it about YOU or about JESUS? Is it about what you GET or what you GIVE?
 - d. Be devoted to GOD and not tradition.
 - ii. Second, **Teach the Word of God and not tradition alone.**
 - a. Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees was that they were teaching ONLY tradition, thinking that THAT was the heart of the matter.
 - b. As a follower of Jesus, the Bible - inspired by the Holy Spirit - is the center of all you know about God's desire for your life. The Bible is not just a set of rules or collection of wisdom or history. The Bible is the living, breathing, Word of God FOR us.
 - c. Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."
 - d. Our Bible Quizzing Team knows that - and that's why they memorize scripture. We have a Christian Education ministry, small groups, discipleship groups - all who study the scriptures - because it is the Word of God. There are lots of smart people that can help us understand the Bible, but the Bible itself is what transforms us.
 - e. One more word about the Word. In this church, we will never, ever, dismiss, deconstruct, dilute, deny, change, make excuses for, or ignore what the Bible says - in worship, in study, or in any other ministry of the church. It is 100% sufficient for eternal salvation in Jesus Christ, and is the bedrock foundation from which we teach and preach, and it will forever remain the God-breathed Word of God.
 - f. And, finally, let's get real for a second...

iii. Evil has no place in your life as a follower of Jesus.

- a. There's no place for anything Jesus listed for the disciples. There's no place for anything that breaks the Commandments of God.
 - b. And this isn't just about the 10 Commandments - which we can shift to be all external actions, if we try hard enough.
 - c. Jesus told us to love God with everything we have and love our neighbors with the same passion.
 - d. Loving God and loving others means taking the focus off ME - off YOU - and putting it on God and others.
 - e. Evil in our lives is real. Sin in our lives is real - really real. Yet, we're not sinners because we sin. We sin because we're sinners. Jesus died on the cross to defeat sin, and to save sinners like you and me.
 - f. There's no place in your life for staying in sin. Sin is not defined by me or you, and especially not the world. We go back to the first two points - sin is defined by the Word of God as clearly presented in the Bible alone. God graciously gives us His Word so we can avoid the pain and death that comes from sin and evil. The Crossmen said it, "Thank you for saving me!"
 - g. Sin has no power...evil has no power...because of Jesus.
- B. Be devoted to God. Teach the Word of God. And allow God to rescue you from evil and sin.
- C. The Pharisees thought that if they did a hundred things to check the boxes then they would achieve the righteousness of God. Jesus said, turn your heart and eyes to Him FULLY, and what comes out of you will be fruit and light.

4. Conclusion

A. There was a song written by Charlie Hall a bunch of years ago which is our prayer for today...

B. Give us Clean Hands...Give us pure hearts...

We bow our hearts We bend our knees

Oh, Spirit come make us humble

We turn our eyes From evil things

Oh, Lord we cast down our idols

So give us clean hands And give us pure hearts

Let us not lift our souls to another

And give us clean hands And give us pure hearts

Let us not lift our souls to another

*Oh, God let us be A generation that seeks
Who seeks Your face, oh, God of Jacob*

- C. It's not about clean hands. It's not about pure hearts. It's about Jesus IN US making us clean and pure.
- D. In a moment, we'll be celebrating Holy Baptism. In the Jewish culture, baptism started as a ceremonial cleansing process. Clean hands, so to speak.
- E. Jesus gave us a new definition. Jesus' baptism was a baptism of death and resurrection - of going down into the water to die, and be reborn from the water.
- F. It's not about the external, but an inward and spiritual grace from God symbolized and activated by water and the Spirit.
 - i. The real truth of baptism comes as we live it out...as our hearts are focused on God and being disciples of Christ.
 - ii. Jay and Jenna know this as they raise Sloane to follow Jesus.
 - iii. We all join together today to remember OUR baptisms as we help this little one on the first part of her journey to full faith in Jesus Christ.
- G. Let's Pray...
- H. Next week, we will start into Mark chapter 9...