



Free Evangelical
Lutheran Synod
in South Africa

Sermon- 14th Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 16B)

Human laws versus God's Law.

True spiritual purification!



St. John's Lutheran Parish
Shelly Beach

The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Mark 7, 1-13:

- CPH Commentary translation 1 And the Pharisees and some of the scribes *PROCEED TO GATHER* to him, having come from Jerusalem. 2 And upon seeing **some of his disciples**, that they were eating their loaves of bread **with unclean**, that is unwashed, **hands**— 3 You know, the Pharisees and all the Jews, if they do not wash their hands, from elbow to knuckles, do not eat, glomming onto the tradition of the elders.
- 4 And (coming) from the marketplace, if they do not sprinkle/purify themselves, they do not eat. And many other things there are which they receive by tradition **to glom onto**, ritual washings of cups and pitchers and bronze vessels—5 And the Pharisees and the scribes *PROCEED TO QUESTION* him, “Why do your disciples not conduct themselves according to the tradition of the elders, but **with unclean hands** they *regularly eat* their bread?” 6 And he said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy (what would come to pass) concerning you hypocrites, as it is written:
- “This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is distant from me. 7 And in vain they worship me by *consistently teaching* teachings (which are the) commandments of human beings.’ 8 Having left the command of God, you *regularly glom on to* the tradition of human beings.” 9 And he *proceeded to say* to them, “Well do you *regularly set at naught* the command of the God in order that you may observe your tradition. 10 You know, Moses said, ‘Honour your father and your mother’ and ‘The one who speaks evil of father or mother, **let him surely die.**’ 11 But **you!**—it is said, “If a man says to his father or to his mother, ‘Korban,’ that is, ‘a gift to God (is) whatever you derive benefit from with me as the source,’ 12 you no longer allow him to do anything for his father or his mother, 13 making void the Word of God by your tradition which you have handed on. And many like things of this sort you *regularly do.*”
- 14 And upon summoning the crowd again, he *proceeded to say* to them, “You all, hear me, and understand! 15 There is **nothing** from outside a person that goes into him which is able to defile him, but the contrary the things that come out of a person are the things that defile a person.”
- 17 And when he had entered into a home (coming) from the crowd, his disciples *began to enquire of* him about the saying. 18 And he *PROCEEDS TO SAY* to them, “**Are you also so** non-understanding? Do you [not] know that everything that goes into a person from outside is not able to defile him, 19 because it does not go **there**, into his heart, but into his belly, and it goes out into the privy?”—purifying all the foods (that there are). 20 And he *proceeded to say*, “That which goes out of a person, **that** defiles

the person. 21 For, **from within, out of the heart of people**, the bad reasonings go out, fornications, thefts, murders, 22 adulteries, greed, wickednesses, guile, licentiousness, evil jealousy, blasphemy, arrogance, foolishness. 23 All these evil things go out from inside and defile a person.”

• **Let us pray:** *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." Share Your wisdom with us so that we will have eternal Life and the Light of Heaven in us! Amen.*

• **Dear beloved of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit!**

• There they were living with their traditions. The elders always said, that they were from God. Traditions and customs are good for life on this earth. We need rituals. We always brush our teeth the same way. The way we place food on our plate, is usually the same. Certain times in our life, like birthdays, we do certain things, mostly in the same order every year. Both children and those who have been young for 60 years plus in general love their customs. We feel at home in the customs that surround us. There is nothing wrong with rituals, traditions and customs per Se. We have them, they are so embedded in us that we often don't even realise that we do them all the time.

• So, what happened that day, with Jesus, the Pharisees and Scribes? Some of Jesus' disciples did not wash their hands before eating. That was forbidden in Jewish culture, because it meant you would get unclean. The Pharisees and Scribes questioned Jesus about this. Why are your followers not obeying the elders of the Jews? How does Jesus answer them?

• Firstly, He criticised the fact that they were placing these customs of the elders above God's commandments. They were prepared to change the Law of God for the sake of keeping the law of their elders! In other words, they were elevating the law of their elders, which was law by humans, above God's Law.

• This is very important to note this, please, because so often the Pharisees are portrayed as being those who cling to the Law of God above all else, in our times. This was not the case! They clung to the laws of their elders above all which effectively caused them to when it came to practical application, to use the Ten Commandments of God as secondary. They argued against this, because they saw the laws of the elders in line with God's Law.

• And here Jesus reveals the first problem we all have with our customs, with our laws, which we like to cling to: We tend to honour them higher than God's Laws. And although we like to say 'we live in a lawless society'- its not completely true- because every human being has his or her laws, its just a question of which law he or she values the highest.

• We had a classic example in the last week: In 2016 the NG Kerk went back on its decision of 2015 to allow homosexuals to become pastors. Because of this a group of

human right activists made a case against the NG Kerk accusing them of discrimination etc. Now listen closely: The NG Kerk defended their decision with the fact that they went back to the Scriptures and after an in depth study and prayer came to the conclusion that their previous decision was not congruent with the Word of God and therefore they overturned the original decision. How did the human right activists respond to this? They said that the NG Kerk's decision was against the constitution of South Africa.

- Do you see what is happening here? The constitution of South Africa is given higher priority than the Word of God, than the Law of God. When God's Law has to give way to man-made laws, Jesus stands up and says, that is unlawful. That is lawlessness. God's Law is absolute. It weighs more than any human rights clauses or any human laws and customs.
- As long as human customs, laws and legislation don't in any way violate God's Law they should be adhered to, also by the Christians. But, whenever they go against God's Law we should obey God more than humans. However, we must be absolutely certain that such is the case. This should not be done lightly.
- And so this also touches our own customs and laws in our lives. We have to know the Law of God so that we can realise if the rules we adhere to are maybe marginalising the Laws of God. We have to test ourselves, the customs and rules we follow, whether they maybe are tampering with the Law of God, whether we like those rules and customs of ours so much, because they make us feel and look better than we truly are in the light of the absolute Law of God. We have to allow that our traditions, also the traditions of the church and congregation are checked against the Word of God. We can never simply assume that there was no drift along the years. We have to listen to Jesus also when it comes to the Law of God. We cannot trust our own gut-feeling and tradition. We have to revisit and check these things against the clear Word of Christ, which He has provided for us. And if we detect a drift, we need to correct it, just like with the NG Kerk. What a miracle that such a large church body was led to such a turn around!
- In the FELSISA, at the pastor's convention, we have also realised that a decision taken on a Synodical Convention held on "21 January 1932 in Uelzen that no person of colour is to be recognised as a member of the FELSISA, with pastoral care being provided to individuals from case to case" was not according to Scripture. That was going too far and therefore the proposal is on the table to revoke that decision. So, let us make use of the clear Word of God, to guide us!
- The second thing Jesus reveals in this case, which is just as relevant to our times, is, that He gives His disciples the right to abandon the teachings of Leviticus 11! That was a part of the divine written Law of the Old Testament. We have to realise, that this

was a tremendously radical and new thing to do! Now, we can understand why immediately the question came up amongst the Pharisees and Scribes, Jesus, who gave you the authority to do this! How can you change the Laws of God?

- Jesus could, because the old sacrificial system, ordered by God in the OT, had been fulfilled and replaced with the sacrifice of the Lamb of God! New wine needs new wine skins! So Jesus declared all foods clean.

- Not what goes into a person defiles him or her, but what comes out of the person defiles him. Out of the heart come evil thoughts! That is what defiles a person before God. That is why not washing your hands before eating does not make you unclean in God's eyes, since Christ's coming.

- It did in OT days when anyone would eat the sacrificial meat with unwashed hands in the temple. But, now, with the arrival of Jesus' ministry, that special legislation God had set-up for the animal sacrifices of the OT, was null and void.

- But this did not mean that Jesus in any way relaxed the original intention of God's Law. If what comes out of the heart is what makes one unclean then *all people are unclean*, then humankind as a whole cannot be clean or become undefiled by its own devices and doing!! Jesus teaches the radical doctrine of original sin here, which no other religion even comes close to. Its completely unique!

- Therefore, Jesus took up His ministry, was baptised to be the sacrifice of all sacrifices and that spells real Good News for all of humankind. The fulfilment of all sacrifices had arrived, God's kingdom was at hand. A divinely instituted new era began where the original will of God was revealed and fulfilled by God's only-begotten Son!

- God wants reconciliation between Himself and us and amongst humankind, *on His terms*, namely through the sacrifice of His only-begotten Son! Whoever rejects His act of sacrifice will remain forever connected with his or her unholy heart.

- On the other hand, whoever receives God's act of forgiveness as poor in the spirit, through the means God provided, through Word and Sacrament, is cleansed and sanctified by the blood of Jesus.

- And those who have arisen with Christ in Baptism through faith given to them, will want to learn the wisdom of God's original Will and intentions with humankind. For such the Word of Jesus becomes to be everything in their life. Through His Word He renews and guides them!

- Glory be to God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

- *"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen. [KJV 2 Cor3:14.]*