

September 2, 2018

Prayer

May the words of my mouth be meditations of our hearts and be always acceptable unto thee. O Lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Sermon

This moment with Jesus that we have in the gospel reading for today, I think is a very important one. We have the scribes and Pharisees who have come up from Jerusalem. They're trying to ... I suspect some are trying to really understand who Jesus is and what he is about. Other's have been sent probably to try to trick Jesus into saying something that would turn the people against him.

But in this moment, they observe some of the disciples eating without washing their hands first. And for them that was an offense. It was something that goes against, and they're clear about this as it says in the gospel reading, a tradition of the elders. This is what was not a God-given doctrine. This was something that the elders had made part of their traditions. Probably to keep people healthy. It was not a bad thing to do. But how important was it?

The term that they used was they were defiled. Their hands were defiled. They weren't clean. And so, somehow, they were not in the right place for any kind of a ritual at that point not that one was going on. And so, they're trying to understand and asking Jesus, "Why do you allow your disciples to do that? Why isn't it important for you to have your disciples follow the traditions of the elders?" And he states pretty clearly, "It's not the tradition of the elders that are important. Don't confuse those with the law of God. Don't confuse those with the things that are really important in the living out a life of faith."

It's nothing that goes into a person that can defile them. To make them ritually unrighteous or separated from God. It's not about that. It's about how they are living their lives. It's about how they know and understand the doctrine of God. It's about knowing those commandments that were given before. It's about how they are in relationship with God and how they are in relationship with one another. And the traditions of the elders about washing your hands has nothing to do with that.

You're called to live according to God's law, God's commandments. And if you're doing that it doesn't matter what you eat or how you eat it. It's about how you see one another. It's about how you live your life in relationship. And he lists so many of the things that we know and understand as sin. The things that truly separate us from God. Pride. Folly. Envy. Licentiousness. Avarice. Adultery.

All these things that come not from going inside a person but comes from evil intentions. Comes from within. Desires that are not reigned in. That are not understood. That are not kept under control. Those are the things that lead to murder, to adultery. To so many things that God has said, "These are not of the people of God." And to be concerned about whether someone has washed their hands properly before having something to eat and trying to put that in the same level, on the same terms as the commandments of God, the doctrine of God was wrong.

And Jesus wants them to see and know and understand that as important as the laws are and as good as they can be. They need to make sure that they understand those that come from God and those that were developed by the elders. What is it that we as humans have come up with? And what is it that God has called all people to, all creation to?

And there is a difference. And we need to know and understand that. We need to know and understand that it's not just what we think is proper behavior. But what is it that God has said don't do these things. It hurts the relationship. Relationships between you and God and the relationships between one another.

If we skip down to the letter of James ... you know James is trying to tell this early first century church the same kind of thing. That we are called as the church to be doers of the word not just hearers. It's not enough for us to hear the word and say we believe and then go and live our lives any old way we want to. We are called to something new. And we are called to a higher standard of living. We are called to through our forgiveness, through our justification in baptism, start on that path of sanctification. Trying to become what God intended for us to be. And we don't do that when we talk ill towards one another or about others. Unbridled tongues is how he put it.

We are called to care about one another. Care about the feelings of one another. We are called to understand that those very same things that hurt us when someone speaks ill or wrongly of us. If we do the same to others, how are we doing any better than they? We are called to hear the word of God that says that we are to live differently, be differently, share a world, share the resources. Be a part. Care enough to want to have mercy and justice. Respect, integrity, all the things that we want for ourselves.

We are asked to give to one another. Even when we don't receive them from others. That's what it is to be a Christian. It's not to be reduced to the level of others because they treat us badly. Or we're afraid we won't get our part or won't get our due. Or won't get our credit. We are called to live according to the ways of Christ no matter what. When it's difficult. Even when it's painful. We are called to live according to

the ways of Jesus. A way of caring and compassion. A way of mercy and justice. A way of loving and caring.

And when we hear that, and we say, “Yes Lord, that’s the way we want to see the world.” That doesn’t give us the license to judge others by that. We accept the gospel of Jesus Christ. We accept what he has shown us in the example of his living. We accept the gift of life that he gives us through his death and resurrection for us. It changes us. It changes me. And that’s all I can expect.

I can hope that others hear that message. I can hope that others understand that the way of peace and the way of love is the way of true life. But I cannot demand it of others. I can only demand it of myself. I can only live it out for me. And if that changes the way someone else sees who I am or sees how the world can be, then we have shared the gospel message with them. But it’s only through the living out of our lives. Not trying to legislate right or moral behavior. But living it out and showing that it is a way of peace. Showing that it is a way of goodness. Showing that it is a way of joyfulness.

To know that we are living in relationship with God in the way that God wanted us to be in creation. To live according to the way that his son showed us life can be lived. Even when that life becomes sacrificial. Then there’s a joyfulness in knowing that we are becoming what God has intended us to be. And if you’re looking for anything else, anything other than that ... If you’re looking to change your relative or your neighbor by reminding them over and over again that they are supposed to do this or they’re supposed to do that. You’re going to be frustrated as a Christian. Being a Christian changes the person. And only as my life has changed is the world changed. Even a little bit.

We are living in a time when it’s hard to tell the Christian way because we hear it expressed in so many different ways. But I believe that when

our Presiding Bishop says that the way of Jesus is the way of love. And if it's not about love, it's not about God. I think he's absolutely right. And as much as I would like for the world to embrace that. I cannot make them do that. And you cannot make them do that. It is only in knowing for ourselves, for myself, that the gospel is about that. And as difficult as it can be sometimes to be that person that I know that God wants me to be, I also know that I can receive forgiveness and I can try again when I fail.

It's about doing not hearing. It's about being the Christian that we are called to be. And allowing the world to see that with the hopes that they might hear that gospel. They might see and believe that this truly is the way of life and joy and peace. And they may choose to follow as well.

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