



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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September 13, 2009
15th Sunday after Pentecost
Mark 7:1-8, 14, 15, 21-23
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 119c
Second Lesson: James 1:17-27
Gospel: Mark 7:1-8, 14, 15, 21-23

Avoid Hypocrisy
Follow God's Word
Have a clean heart

Have you ever been called a hypocrite? If so, did you like it? Did you think "Oh, that's nice. I like being called a hypocrite." Being called a hypocrite stings because it's saying you say one thing and do another, or in the case of what we're looking at today, that we believe certain things about ourselves and about God and yet we don't do them. Sometimes people try to say "Oh, it's not really worth me going to church because all you Christians are just hypocrites anyhow. You say one thing, but I see you doing something completely different on Saturday night. Then you go to church on Sunday and act like you're holy and perfect. So why do I want to go be around a whole bunch of hypocrites?"

Well the fact of the matter is that you and I are going to act like hypocrites all the time, aren't we? You and I love God. We love the fact that Jesus lived and died in our place and took away all our sins. And we have a part of us that wants to serve Jesus, wants to live for him, wants to do all the things to say "thank you for opening heaven to me." But what do we often do? We often do the exact opposite, right? Isn't that what Paul described in Romans? "The good I want to do, that I do not do. The evil I do not want to do, that I keep on doing." Do you ever find that at work in your life? You want to do what's right, but you still end up sinning, doing what God says not to do or not doing the things that God tells you to do. So there's no doubt in my mind that at times you and I live as hypocrites because we sin.

This morning, as we look at these words from the Gospel of Mark, we want to see how to avoid falling into the state of ongoing hypocrisy, where it's a continual state and not just a weakness of our faith. That line at times can become razor thin when we start excusing and making rationalizations for our sins and saying why they are a good thing or saying why it's someone else's fault and what not. We can fall into the state of ongoing hypocrisy which the Pharisees had fallen into. We really can learn from Jesus' words to them to see how we want to live. And the one thing I think that Jesus points out quite clearly today is to make sure you follow God's Word, not just what you've always done.

The Pharisees knew the traditions of the teachers of their people backwards and forwards. Yet, they didn't know the Word of God as well as they should have. The question becomes, are we in danger of becoming that?

Secondly, when we see how often we have screwed up, we see Jesus pointing us also in the direction of not worrying about what we put into our body that makes it unclean, like the eating regulations or the ceremonial washing of hands, but focus on what it is that really gives us a clean heart, what changes us inside so that what comes out matches what we want it to be more and more in our lives, to have a pure heart.

As you look at these words of Jesus from the Gospel of Mark this morning, all this talk about clean hands and washing; he's not just talking about when you were a kid and mom told you to wash your hands before you ate. That's not what he's talking about. That's what Mark tries to describe in those parenthetical remarks for his readers so that they would understand what he was talking about. They held to a ceremonial washing. The word "washing" in Greek is "*baptizo*," where we get "baptize" from. When they would be out and when they might come in contact with things that would make them ceremonially unclean, they would say "I'm setting myself apart for God and I'm using this water to wash away what I might have come into contact with." They would sprinkle water, pour just a sprinkling on their hands. It wasn't scrubbing it with soap and water like we might think about. It's this ceremonial washing that probably began with a good and godly idea – "remind myself that I am to be set apart for God."

There's nothing wrong with that, but God hadn't commanded that they do that. So when they start adding to God's commands and say "you have to do this and if you don't do this, you are offending God," they go beyond what God said. And we heard in the First Lesson, Deuteronomy, it said "Don't add to what God has said. Don't subtract from it, but don't add to it." That's what they had done.

So when they get all uptight and wound up and want to let Jesus have it because his disciples aren't following the traditions of the people, Jesus kind of verbally let's them have it, doesn't he? "You hypocrites;" those words had to sting. "Your hearts are far from me. You worship me with your lips, but your hearts are far from me. You worship me in vain. Your teachings are but rules taught by men." Then he says to them, "You let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men." He just slapped them across the face with those words. That's what it was designed to do; to show them that they had fallen away from what God had said and had elevated their own words to the level of being on the same level of God. Anytime you do that, you are going to end up trying to say "God, you must love me because look at all I do. I have clean hands. I remembered to ceremonially wash them. That bozo over there didn't. You must love me better." Anytime you and I want to approach God on the basis of our own actions, we're in deep trouble because our own actions stink to high heaven.

We can shake our head at these Pharisees, right? "Oh, how silly they are. They should know better." And they should have, but how silly they are. The question has to come into our minds, when might you and I be tempted to become like the Pharisees? Be

tempted to hang on to the traditions of men at the expense of knowing what God's Word actually says? Is that possible for you and me?

Next Sunday worship won't be here. Next Sunday, worship is going to be down at Way-Mor Park, right? There's a little river going right by there, right? It's kind of green on the top, but let us assume we find a clear spot and let's say we have a baptism next Sunday. I don't know that we have one, but let's say we do. If I go next Sunday and I have you all gather down by the river and I baptize that person by putting them completely under water, any of you here think I did something wrong? You've probably never seen it in your life in our church, have you? We don't have babies that small to fit inside that little font, right? That must be why we don't do it them.

If I did that without teaching it first, I have to believe someone would think, "Can he really do that? Is that right? Is that okay?" So often we go by what we see, and if we've never seen it, we assume it must be wrong. This word "washing" here is "*baptizo*." The word "*baptizo*" means to apply water in any manner, pouring, sprinkling or immersing; but if you're going to wash something, normally you put it under water, right? I don't think any of you wash your dishes at home by just sprinkling a little water on them and then just setting them back up in the cupboards. They'd get a little fuzzy, wouldn't they?

So did you ever wonder then why we don't baptize by immersion? If it is Biblically allowable, why don't we do it? There is a reason, but do you know it? There are those that say you have to baptize that way and if you do not, it is not a valid baptism. That goes beyond what Scripture says. Scripture talks about "*baptizo*" (washing) as applying water. Sometimes it is by sprinkling, like we have in this text here today. Because they say that you have to do it the other way, to show that we are free to baptize this way, that's why we do it this way. But you have to kind of wonder if our witness has gone too far in the other direction if some of us would think this is wrong to put completely under water. But again, we are so wrapped up at times in what we have seen that we don't know what the Word of God actually says.

Another thing in our congregational life that we have seen, would we think there is something sinful or something wrong with this; the question was brought up this last week at Church Council, at Elders and then at Church Council. Someone asked, "Could we have women usher?" In the history of this congregation, I think, for 147 years, we've never had it, right? What does Scripture say about the issue? Do you know?

Scripture says a woman shouldn't have authority over a man in the church. God said it in Corinthians and Timothy. If God said it, it's not up to me to correct God. So the question you have to ask is, would having women serve as ushers exercise authority over someone in the church? Do we ask our ushers to exercise authority? Do they tell you to take the Bulletin in your right hand, not your left hand because you are taking it wrong? Or do they just hand out a Bulletin? Do they just perform that service and gather and offer? The way we have ushers function right now, I don't think they

exercise authority over anyone and if you would want to do it, I think a congregation could say, "We want to. It's a good idea. We are free to do it." Or a congregation could say, "We'd like to see men more involved, or young men more involved, so we'll keep that for them to usher so that they are involved." I think you'd be free to say either thing. But if we jumped into it this week, if there were women ushers serving this week, do you think someone sitting here would be thinking to themselves, "This is sinful," simply because we've never seen it? Probably, that's why you have to take the time to teach.

The other thing I think at times, I hear this a lot; "It must be okay. I've seen other WELS churches do it." That's nice. That's great, but is that the same as saying, "This is what God says"? If that's all we are going to rely on, that we've seen someone else do it so it must be okay, shouldn't we at least be honest and do the mental leg work to search Scripture ourselves? Or just say, "Others have done it. It's okay." Isn't that the same thing that the Pharisees would be doing?

If we don't dig into Scripture to see what's okay or what's not, then we just start wanting to work by a rule book. "This is what we can do. This is what we can't do," instead of digging into God's Word. God wants us to dig into his Word whenever any of these kinds of questions come up so that we search to what we saw this morning in Bible Study that angels love to look into, things that they don't even know, that they love hearing the Word of God discussed and learn from it. That's what God wants us to do.

But here's the question, how well equipped are we to do it? Or even, how interested are we in doing it? Or do we just want to take the lazy way of saying others do it, others don't do it?

We started school again now, right? So we will be getting into grade school sports, right? Tell me in the middle of grade school sports seasons if we aren't more familiar with substitution patterns of the coaches than we are with the book of God. We know more about how grade school sports, how coaches substitute, than we know about the Minor Prophets or about the general Epistles, or more about the Major Prophets or the Poetical Writings. Do we even know what any of those words mean that I just said?

Answer me this; which will we talk more about? God's love for us in Christ, or how people substitute?

If we aren't going to dig into God's Word, we are always going to be in danger of becoming just like the Pharisees who do the right things without knowing why and who do the wrong things thinking it's the right things. If you want to avoid hypocrisy, falling into its ongoing state, you and I need to follow God's Word to be able to dig into that Word. The fact of the matter is that you and I are going to screw up. You and I are going to do things that God has said not to do. We are going to sin. How we react to our sin is of ultimate and eternal importance. If we can't even see where to go in God's Word to find out about what's right and what's wrong, what we should be doing and what we shouldn't be doing, we probably also aren't going to go into God's Word and find out how we get a clean heart, how we get a pure heart. We don't get a pure heart

by doing the right thing or by always saying the right thing; or in the case of these people, following the Old Testament ceremonial laws, eating the right thing. Jesus says what goes into your body doesn't make you unclean, but what comes out of you, because it flows out of what you are.

If you have a heart that is separated from God, it will show up constantly in your actions. If you have a heart that is close to God, a heart that has been washed and made clean through God's love for us in Jesus Christ that has taken away our sins; excuses don't take away our sins, but God's love for us in Christ that has taken away our sins, it will show in our lives. And the more we grow in our knowledge of that Word, the more we see what a precious gift was given to us at our baptism where we were covered with the righteousness of Christ, so that when God looks at us, he doesn't see all the stupid things that we do. He sees that we are forgiven children of God because Jesus was perfect in our place.

That's what we get when we come up to the Lord's Supper. There is it, the very body and blood that was given for us. That's how intensely God wants us to know this and treasure it. You and I don't have to make excuses for our acts of hypocrisy, our sin. We know what's going to happen. And if you find yourself looking down your nose at someone that has fallen into a sin, slap yourself, because we are all going to sin. Rejoice when a sinner knows that God has taken away their sins. Rejoice when a sinner knows they are forgiven because Jesus lived and died in their place. Don't give them grief about what they've done when they've repented. That's an act of a Pharisee. But rejoice with the angels in heaven over that sinner that repents.

At times you and I are really going to be tempted to commit that act of hypocrisy of thinking our heart is purer than someone else's and if they were only more like us, things would be better. No, we want people to be close to God, not close to us. We want people to know what God has done for them in Christ. That's why we want to follow the Word, because in that Word, Christ gives us what he demands of us – the perfection, because he has taken away our sins.

Our God is crazy about us. He's so crazy about us he took 1,600 years to write a love letter to us. It's called the Bible. And he wants us to dig into it every day so we know everything he feels about us. Our God is so crazy about us he knows we're lazy and we're not going to dig into that Word. So he gives us baptism where he covers us with Christ's righteousness. And our God knows we are going to ignore baptism and the blessing it gives us and think about it as something way back then instead of something that's there for us every day. So he gives us his body and blood, in, with and under the bread and wine so we can taste it and smell it and touch it and say, "This is how much my God loves me."

Our God knows our weaknesses, so he has all kinds of ways to bring that Gospel to us to give us that pure heart. Hold tight to that Gospel and then we'll avoid falling into that ongoing state of hypocrisy.