

Mark 7:1-23

Sara J Larson

Psalm 51

Lay Minister

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First Lutheran Church

*“What defiles?”*

Marshall, MN

Lord let the words off my lips and the mediation of my heart be pleasing to you My Creator, the Sustainer, Our Redeemer, AMEN.



Well, what does defile even mean? To trample on, violate, or spoil. In today’s lesson, it means what makes one unholy or unrighteous with God. In Mark’s story, we see how this word brings meaning to Jewish law. Jesus is on his mission to heal and teach and preach the word of God. The teachers that were assigned to do this work, the Pharisees and scribes have gotten it all wrong and Jesus tells them just that.

Instead of recognizing the miracles that Jesus is doing healing and driving out demons, these teachers point to their man-made rules and question why Jesus and his disciples are not washing their hands according to the traditions set up by man to separate the Jewish people from others. The Pharisees do not trust Jesus because he has taken a stature of authority. He is questioning their leadership and is spending all of his time with the sick, poor, lonely and ordinary sinners.



Jesus calls these teachers hypocrites and cites scripture from Isaiah, telling the men they are only providing lip service. Their hearts

are not in it. Jesus goes on to accuse them of rejecting God, by failing to follow the commandment of loving and honoring their parents. In those times, there was a verbal commitment called a Corban. Man-made leaders in the Church advocated that people could Corban their estate to the Church. This made one look in good standing with the church and it froze your assets from being taken or used in other ways. But there were many loopholes for people to use their wealth and give it to others as they saw fit. Reminds me of some of our tax laws today. So what Jesus was saying was that people were gifting their future estate to the church to look charitable, but when their parents and elders needed their support they could play the “Corban card” and say they could not help them because all their funds were promised to the church.

How do you know the heart of a person? You have to get to know them. You can't assume anything based on the color of their skin, the way they dress, how much money they make, or what kind of car they drive. But we do this anyways and everyone knows it, so people try to put on airs to look like they are competent, capable, God-fearing people who have it all together right? The truth is you and I are just as unclean as everyone else. We all sin and do not have it all together. The most heinous sins of any one person have the potential to be the sins of anyone of us, as we are all human pushed to different extremes.



God is the only one who makes us right. Through the death and resurrection of His son Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven. The Holy Spirit has been poured out into creation to guide and direct us. Nothing we do or do not do can put us in better favor with the Lord, but it is through dying to oneself that we can gain true life and live it fully.

A full and holy heart loves when it is easy to hate, gives when it is extremely painful and listens when they would rather scream. Being human, we have all kinds of emotions and desires, some hidden and some flaunted out in the open. But God creates in us a clean heart. Our hearts can reflect God's love and this is so much more important than clean hands.

What gives you life? God wants us to live a joy-filled, life-giving existence. He wants us to do right by our parents and neighbors, not to look good but to feel good and because it is the right thing to do. Rules, laws, and the commandments were given to protect us and others. Taking these rules to the extreme, without using our God-given common sense, puts us in a bad place.

Jesus was a rule breaker. He chastised the Pharisees every chance he got to show us that being in good standing is not determined by what is in your bank account but what is in your heart. Our actions show what is in our hearts and even if our actions hurt someone else, Jesus gives us the chance to repent and be restored.

One style of communication and listening is called mirroring. It is a way of creating rapport and making a person feel comfortable in a conversation, but it can be very annoying when one of your siblings or children repeats back everything that you have said.



Jesus is asking us to hold a mirror up to our hearts. To see what is inside us by the way we outwardly express ourselves. Evil comes from within us. It is not something we eat. It is something that resides in us much longer than our digestive system takes to work. In Psalm 139 we ask God to search us and know our heart. In Psalm 51 and in the confession of forgiveness of sins we ask that the Lord have mercy on us and blot out our transgressions and wash us as clean as newly fallen snow. It is through the power of the Holy Spirit we can confess our sins, receive forgiveness, and grow into the fullness of Jesus Christ. By grace, we are saved. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ lives in our hearts. If Christ is in our hearts, we cannot be unclean or unholy. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a French Philosopher said that we are “Spiritual beings having a human existence.” If that is true we need not try as hard to fit in and rest in the holiness within us. God says you are holy because you are mine. (Lev. 20:26) If we have no intent to harm we are blameless, but if we wish to intentionally cause pain, discomfort, and ill-will we need to check our heart.

Fear and misunderstandings cause us to do and believe many things that open up our hearts to filth. But the promise of God begs us to purify ourselves from all that contaminates our body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence to God. (2 Corinthians 7:1)



Jesus is dismissing the old saying “you are what you eat”. For it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles, but what comes out. It is the words from our hearts and thoughts and deeds of our bodies that corrupt us. We need not be afraid of people of different traditions, unconventional attire, or those that speak a different language. There is no reason to fear the other because Christ came to save us all and he can forgive all sin. Lord, help us repent from the sin in our hearts, fill us with the love you have that brings life and joy into our essence. Create in us clean hearts. In your name, we pray, Amen.