**SUNDAY 8/29/21**

**SERMON**

**MARK 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23**

There was a small town Catholic church in upstate New York.

Their Priest had been at the church for over 35 yrs.

He was loved by the congregation, and the whole community.

But the time came when he retired, and he was replaced by a young Priest.

Things went O.K. for the first few months.

However, he began to feel that the congregation was in some way upset with him. He was troubled because he could not discover what was wrong.

He called aside one of the leaders of the church and said,

          "I don't know what is wrong,

          but I have a feeling the congregation is upset about something I am doing."

The man hesitated, but finally spoke honestly.

He said, "Well, Father that is true.

          I hate to say it, but it is the way you do the Communion Service."

“The way I do the Communion Service?" asked the Priest. "What do you mean?”

“Well, it is not so much what you do, as what you leave out.”

“But I don't leave out anything of the Communion Service.”

"Oh yes, you do.

          Just before our previous rector administered the bread and wine

          to the people, he would always go over and touch the radiator.

          And, then, he would give out the wine and bread.

          That is our tradition."

“Touch the radiator? I never heard of such a liturgical tradition.”

Upset, the new Priest called the former rector and told him:

          "I have only been here a few months and I am already in trouble.

          It seems to have something to do with touching the radiator.

          Could that be possible?           Did you do that?"

"Oh yes, I did." Said the older Priest.

          "Always before I offered the chalice to the people,

          I touched the radiator to discharge the static electricity

          so I wouldn't shock them."

For over 35 years, the people of his congregation thought

          that touching the radiator was a part of some holy tradition.

They did not question it, or try to find out its meaning.

They simply believed it was an important part of the sacrament.

Like the scribes and the Pharisees in this morning's reading,

          they held more tightly to human traditions, than the teachings of God.

And because of their belief, they were missing the important things

          their new Priest was struggling to teach them,

          and bring them closer to their Heavenly Father.

Jesus said to them, and He says to us:

          These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me;  
          They abandon the commandment of God, and hold to human tradition.

We need to listen to God and obey Him, rather than follow our own plans & ideas.

There was a man who came home late at night, very drunk.

He did not want to awaken his wife, and get into an argument,

          so he snuck up the stairs very quietly.

He looked in the bathroom mirror and bandaged all the bumps and bruises

          he had received in a fight earlier that night.

He then proceeded to climb into bed,

          smiling at the thought that he had pulled one over on his wife.

When morning came, he opened his eyes and there stood his wife.

“You were drunk last night weren’t you?”

“No, honey.”

“Well, if you weren’t, then who put all the band-aids on the bathroom mirror?”

No matter how careful we are, no matter how carefully we try to hide our sins,

          sooner or later our sin will be noticed.

James taught that we needed to put aside our sinfulness and listen,

          and obey God's Word.

It is easy to listen to God's Word.

It is harder to obey it.

But when we do not follow God's commands, we accomplish very little.

And we miss out on the gifts God wishes to bestow upon us.

Sir Nicholas Winston was a stockbroker in 1938

          when Hitler’s troops began to march into Czechoslovakia.

He knew deep in his heart that something evil was underfoot.

He quit his job as a stockbroker and began to charter trains, raise money, and

          transport Jewish children out of Nazi occupied Czechoslovakia and

          Poland.

Because of him, nearly 700 Jewish children escaped what would have been

          imminent death in Nazi prison camps.

He knew the Nazis might arrest and imprison him at any moment.

But Sir Winston did not hesitate.

He used every source available to save one more child, one more life.

He risked everything he had, including his own life,

          to do what was right in God's eyes.

The Pharisees didn't appear as monsters.

They seemed to be very holy people with high religious standards.

But they were using their own standards instead of God's standards.

They tended to be very destructive in their words and dealings with the people,

           and were even insulting and critical to Jesus.

They were a constant thorn in Jesus' side.

They were sarcastic, judgmental, and abrasive.

They did not build people up, but rather, they tended to tear others down.

They criticized everyone and everything.

They put barriers between God and God's people.

The Pharisees intimidated and bullied people.

They were experts at finding fault

They were arrogant and demeaning toward others.

The Pharisees weren't builders.

They were bulldozers.

When Jesus reached out to the lost –

          they condemned Him for keeping company with sinners.

When He healed a crippled person –

          they said He did it on the wrong day.

When He forgave someone of their sins –

          they said He was blaspheming.

Even when He would cast out devils, they managed to find fault.

We can either be a team building a beautiful new home.

Or we can be a bulldozer destroying a house,

          knocking down walls, doors and roofs.

We are here to build one another up, to encourage and strengthen one another.

God calls us to share the message of His love and forgiveness.

He wants us to do what He has called us to do:

          to be loving, compassionate, merciful, and forgiving.

Eternal life not about our rituals, our traditions, theories, prejudice, or pride.

It is about God's commands, and following, and obeying Him.

It is about a whole new way of life.

AMEN