



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. AMEN

Oh, how I love a routine. Even though I often get in a funk doing the same thing, the same way every day, I feel secure in the routines that fill my life. Doing the same things day in and day out can give us security, a feeling of all is well. I make the coffee first every morning, then I take my vitamins, then on to breakfast. I do change up the menu every day so as not to get bored. Yet, I easily fall into a routine. I guess I am a creature of habit, quite accustomed to doing things the same way.

We at Christ the Servant, as a church are probably no different. Every church has its own traditions as well. When you came to worship this morning, you expected certain things to happen, right? Sing hymns with the organ playing? Listen to God's word? Collect the offering? Receive Holy Communion? And we certainly cannot forget the coffee hour that follows in the Fellowship Hall. Although today a slight change, a full picnic lunch!

Think with me for a minute back to 18 months ago. We had a challenge. A pandemic did not allow us to worship the way we have always worshipped. And for some of us this was quite disturbing. Watching my sermons on Facebook. Imagine that. Drive through communion or communion in our seats with little prepackaged cups of juice with a wafer on top. And no fellowship, no visiting after worship with our brothers and sisters in Christ. WOW, things really did change for those first few months of COVID-19.

And maybe those changes were good for us. As church we had to abandon several of our traditions that were long held as sacred cows. How we did communion, when we sang liturgy and hymns, etc. I think it put renewed emphasis on the things we were doing rather than how we did them. Make sense? Some things in a church can become holy in and of themselves and seem unchangeable. That is when they move from being routine to being a sacred cow. And we all know that when we tamper with sacred cows someone will become upset. Yet, here at CTS we made it through the pandemic, at least so far, without causing

too much drama.

Well, our Gospel lesson today from the book of Mark seems to be all about sacred cows. The Pharisees and scribes have confronted Jesus and his disciples as to why they do not follow the rituals. They do not attack Jesus directly but rather they call him out on their cherished precepts. What they criticize does not seem to be a huge deal to us, but to them, it was the breaking of a ritual of washing hands.

For the religious leaders, hand washing prior to eating was not so much a hygienic measure. It was a practice to wash away defilement. The Law of Moses mandated hand washing only for priests attending to their duties in sacred areas. But over the years the ritual was extended as sacred to other circumstances, like for everyone, prior to every meal. And so, the Pharisees call out Jesus and his band of disciples as not fulfilling the traditions that set them apart from non-Jews.

Jesus calls the people to him and explains that it is not what goes in that defiles, but rather what comes out of a person is what can make them unclean. What Jesus is getting at here is that it is not how you act on the outside that is important, but rather what is inside of you, in your heart that is important. And for Jesus the heart is the core of the person, it is the inner self. Jesus wants us to have him in our hearts. Our hearts should not be filled with rituals or traditions but rather with love for God and for our neighbor.

As many of you know, I am a musical buff. I love the old and the even some of the new musicals. One of my favorites is "Fiddler on the Roof". How many of you know the story? Do you remember my favorite song, that Tevye sings while sitting on the roof of his house? "Tradition". This song is an explanation of why tradition, as he sees it, is important to his family. He then says, "Our tradition tells us who God is and who we are." What a great statement. I think that when tradition does that it is a good tradition.

For over 500 years now, our Lutheran Christian church has observed two traditions, Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. These are the best of all traditions, and they too tell us, as Tevye said, "Who God is and who we are." They are filled with spiritual realities behind and beyond the tradition itself.

The rituals the Pharisees want to hold Jesus accountable too, do not speak to who God is and who we are. They became, over time more important than what they were meant to signify, the cleansing of the spirit of the heart. Apparent to Jesus, He commented that their tradition was not worthy to be observed, for it did not deal with important matters of the heart. Some might say that He thought heart condition was more important than hand condition.

And so, we take away this lesson today that what is in our hearts is so much more important than whether our hands are clean before eating. Our traditions can be pure and wonderful if we do not give glory to them, but rather give them significance as to how they change our hearts toward God.

I wish more of my confirmation students were here. I would ask them about the unusual word that we learned in class. I always encouraged them to take the word home and ask

mom and dad if they knew what it meant. The children could be one word smarter than their parents. The word is adiaphora. Adiaphora is something that does not matter or has no bearing on our well-being or our spiritual self. An example would be the color of carpeting in the fellowship hall has no effect on how wonderful our coffee hour conversations or our church picnic will be. How we do Holy Communion, whether it be by common cup, pre-poured individual cups, or by intinction. All methods are good traditions if we realize that it is in the drinking of the wine and breaking the bread that God comes to us through faith. It is not the kind of wine or grape juice nor the type of bread that is important. All Adiaphora and the only thing that matters it that it is the body and blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus. We don't even need to know how it comes to be the body and blood of Jesus. That is the mystery and beauty of Holy Communion.

Yes, I know that our rules of the ELCA say that only ordained clergy can serve communion, but that is only as Luther would say, for the good order of the church. I have no special powers in the sacraments, but rather I was trained to perforce these rituals in certain ways, all to give glory to God.

Remember also, in baptism it is God coming to us in the water as His word is being spoken. Both sacraments are how we know who God is and who we are. He promises to be with us for our lifetime, to love us, to walk with us and in His time to bring us to heaven for our eternal rest.

So yes, rituals are ok if they point to who God is and who we are. So don't let adiaphora get in the way. For God is more concerned with who we are on the inside than the outward ceremonies we observe. Nothing wrong with routine, but don't let it get in the way of loving God as He loves us and loving our neighbor as ourselves. AMEN