

Sermon Proper 17 2018

September 2, 2018

Mark 7:14-23

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. The lesson for our meditation from the Gospel previously read.

To defile something, that's not an idea that we ponder on a lot in our culture, is it? We have a few uses for the term that pop up on occasion, but as a whole, the concept isn't something we linger on much. In fact, to be clear, what do I mean when I speak of defiling something? Well, Merriam Webster says it well when among other definitions, it says, *"to make unclean or impure: such as to corrupt the purity or perfection of; or to violate the sanctity of."* Do you think of things as being clean or unclean, pure or impure, sanctified or not? For the most part we don't do we? And in large part that's because of Jesus declaring all food clean as He does in the lesson for today.

But that wouldn't have been the case for the Jews at Jesus' time. Clean and unclean, defiled and undefiled, holy and common would have ideas on their minds constantly. In particular the Jews have wanted to make sure that they remained clean and that they were holy. Likewise they would have constantly avoided becoming unclean and common. In fact, the word that's translated defiled, literally means to make something common. The understanding of the Old Covenant was that if you ate particular foods that would make you unclean which would make you common, not being allowed to have contact then with the realm of God. That's a problem isn't it? It would be like me saying, "if you ate shellfish for dinner last night, or bacon for breakfast this morning, you can't come to church."

You can see why it's a concern, can't you? Especially because access to the temple in Jerusalem was central to their worship. If you wanted access to God, you had to focus on His locatedness at the temple. You wanted to be able to go to that temple and not be forbidden from going by being unclean. Why? To teach us that God is holy, to teach us that anything unclean doesn't fit with standing before Him; that God is so good and holy that anything defiled from that cleanness or holiness could not be in His presence.

Now as we look at Jesus words, we have to understand that this shift, then, is huge. The fact that He would be teaching that it's not food that makes us unclean is foundational. It's colossal because now it means you can eat what you want and come

into God's presence. It means that this whole clean and unclean thing doesn't matter. If I am diseased I can come into God's presence. If I am bleeding I can come into God's presence. This whole category is gone. The Holy and the Common isn't necessarily, and we'll come back to that, but the clean and unclean is.

And this is good for us then to take a minute and sort of carryover from this what we can. Outside of this text, then we see that in Christ the temple no longer is required. God's locatedness, as I put it before, is not there. The curtain tears, and we don't have to be there. Jesus dies on the cross as the perfect sacrifice, now we don't need daily sacrifices. Now, we have Jesus, the sacrifice without blemish put forth for us, for our sins, for our cleansing and perfection. But what about this locatedness of God? Where do we find Jesus?

We find Him where He promises to be—in His Word, in the proclamation of that Word: "He who hears you hears me;" we find Him in baptism: "We were therefore buried WITH HIM through baptism into death, in order that just as He was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too walk in newness of life;" we find Him in His meal: "This is my body." You want to find Jesus, you find Him there. You can be "clean" or "unclean," it doesn't matter. But you can't come defiled. You can't come unholy. So, to come back to the question, what is Jesus saying defiles? What makes us common? What makes us unable to come into the presence of the Holy One? Our Sin.

Now of course, at the essence of even the Old Testament, this is nothing truly new. Yes there was a big deal about all of this clean and unclean stuff, but that wasn't the core of it, even then. After all, what is the most important revelation of all of Moses' Law? Is the Law given to Moses really about which food to eat and which not to eat? Sure that's all important, and we can see its importance in segregating God's people for the arrival of the Messiah. But is the faith really about that food? No, the faith really is always about the Messiah, but look at the most important revelation to Moses. Look at the only words God spoke to the whole assembly from Mt. Sinai. Do you know what those words are? The Ten Commandments. Those words are the words that God deemed so important all of the Israelites should hear them. Why? Because those are at the center of His will. Why is that? Because those are what describe what makes one unholy: violations of that Law. And that's what Jesus is pointing out here. It's the violation of that Law that defiles us; that makes us unholy, unable to stand before God's presence.

But as we look at that, we have to make an extremely important point about this. Where does that sin come from? Where does our desire to break these commandments come from? Is it something where we eat something and that makes us unworthy? Obviously not, that's what we've just been saying. No. Where does it come from? Our hearts. **For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.** As we hear that statement, we need to take it to heart in our day. We need to take this to heart, because in our culture the heart is the only thing that no one can accuse, isn't it? "You can't judge my heart." "You don't know my heart." "My heart tells me..."

In our day, the heart is the only inerrant arbiter of truth. My heart tells me it's good for me to kill this man because he was so mean to me, because he harmed my children. My heart tells me it's good for me to leave my wife and kids and run off with my mistress, because she's the one I really love. My heart tells me it's not so bad if I take a few reams of paper home with me from work, they don't pay me enough. My heart tells me that I don't need to explain everything in the kindest way about my neighbor. Or in our day, my heart tells me that I am born this way. My heart tells me that my gender is fluid and it doesn't matter whom I love. Yes, in our day the heart is untouchable. You can't tell me that my heart isn't pure.

But that's exactly what Jesus tells us, isn't it? When you look at what He's saying, yes it's important for the Jews to hear so that they'll know that all food is clean, but we need to hear it as sinners so that we would know that our hearts aren't. We need to hear it so that we would look at our intentions and we would look at our deeds and we would see we are not pure, but we are unholy and condemned by the Law. Our hearts are sinful and unclean. As the prophet Jeremiah says, we need to understand that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick. Yes your heart wants to deceive you, to lead you away from God because it is desperately sick in sin.

Don't believe it? Examine yourself by this list. Look at how the sickness of your heart manifests itself. Look at your sin that defiles you. Look at what your Lord tells you, **"What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts-**that is evil reckonings, judgements, of situations, **sexual immorality-*porneiai***, where we get the word pornography, **theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality-**licentiousness, **envy-**literally evil

eyes, **slander**-literally blasphemy, **pride**, **foolishness**. **All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.**”

As you hear that list what, does it say to you? Pun somewhat intended, it's disheartening isn't it? It crushes us to hear this, doesn't it? It crushes us because this is the law coming in its full conviction. You can't hide here under your excuses. You can't pretend like you're really a good person who deserves to stand with God, like you or anyone else deserve stand in His presence. You can't hide here with “good intentions.” Anything you see as good in you is a falsehood—it doesn't matter because your heart stands condemned. But isn't that kind of freeing? Isn't it kind of freeing when you don't have any excuse?

It is, isn't it? It is because as you stand condemned and disheartened, without excuse, that's when Jesus comes and shows you His pierced hands and side, and welcomes you into His presence, cleansed by His blood, made holy where He promises to bury your sin in His tomb in the waters of baptism. Where He gives you that body and blood that were defiled on the cross—condemned and hanged on a tree for you. And where you have the promise of a new heart in Him, a replacement for your heart made of stone with a new one made of flesh in the image of the flesh of Christ. A heart made anew by His grace, that you would walk in newness of life in Him, because that's your identity as His baptized child. Do you still have a desire for those old things? Of course, but now in Christ there is also power over them.

In fact, to connect this to the Epistle lesson, a friend told me something really neat this week with regard to that lesson. As we hear of the armor of God, apparently at that time wearing a hero's armor was a big deal. For example, he told me that Alexander the Great wore what was supposed to have been Achilles armor, and someone else, maybe Caligula wore Julius Caesar's, etc. Why? Because it was supposed to give the strength and protection of that person. As Paul talks about us having the armor of God, who is our strength and protection then as we walk around with these corrupt and defiled hearts? Our Lord Himself. Our Lord who covers you in His righteousness, whose blood was shed to make you clean. Our Lord who has won the victory over all sin. Yes, Jesus makes the point that food is not the issue, but sin. But Christians, by His blood your sin, even in the depths of your deceitful heart, has been overcome made undefiled and pure. To God alone be the Glory. Amen.