***“It Is from Within***” by S. Finlan, at The First Church, August 22, 2021

**Mark 7:1–8, 14–15, 21-23**

5 The Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?” 6He said to them, “Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written,
‘This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me;
7 in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.’
8You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition. . . .”

14 Then he called the crowd again and said to them, “Listen to me, all of you, and understand: 15there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile. . . 21For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, 22adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. 23All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

The Jewish religious system had a concept of impurity, ritual impurity, which could sometimes be communicated from one person to another, and moral impurity, which could *not* be communicated by physical contact. Jesus here denies the existence of ritual impurity at all, whether by physical contact or by eating ritually impure foods, focusing only on moral impurity, and pointing out that it comes from a corrupted heart. It is from evil motives that evil behavior comes, and this is the only kind of defilement that concerns Jesus.

He repudiates the Pharisees’ oral law, which they added to the biblical law. He called it “human precepts” that are vain and fruitless. The Pharisees added to the Bible’s ritual purity laws, and compounded the ritual practices they considered mandatory. Jesus ignores all these traditions. Instead, he recommends honest and kind behavior, and a heart that is purified from evil motives.

He does not share the idea that there is a ritual impurity that needs to be washed off. In fact, with Jesus, there is a reverse effect, where Jesus’ life-giving power and health can be imparted through his healing touch. It’s a kind of healing infection. And this happens spiritually, too, when spiritually transformed people touch the lives and have an effect on other people. Then people bring forth the good things that have been dormant within them. Jesus speaks of those who “hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance” (Luke 8:15). He values the sincere and honest heart that is receptive to the word of truth, and he will exhort his disciples to receive the Spirit and to love one another as he loved them.

So let the Spirit act within you, and let your inner life give forth good fruit, such as patience, kindness, grace, and compassion. For from the heart come good things, when your inner life has been transformed by Jesus’ touch.