

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
August 30, 2009

Sermon Title: Lord Jesus, Search My Heart.

Sermon Hymn: LSB 554 "O Jesus, King Most Wonderful"

Sermon Text: Mark 7:14-16 (Series B)

Prayer: May we always be at peace with Jesus searching our hearts.

Sermon Outline:

- I. Pharisaism is still a very real temptation.
- II. Jesus exposes what's inside.
- III. Jesus transforms what's inside.
- IV. What's inside always shows.

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

And he called the people to him again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand: There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him."

Last Sunday's Gospel reading from Mark was the account of the Pharisees confronting Jesus about His disciples not doing the ceremonial-correct thing of washing their hands before they ate. Jesus gave His response, of course. And this Sunday's Gospel reading is the continuation of Jesus' response. Even though these Pharisees came to Jesus in a confrontational way, Jesus really wanted these Pharisees to understand a comforting truth.

Pastor Radtke hit the nail on the head with his sermon 'God's Truth from the Inside Out.' I second all that he preached. How Jesus responds to these Pharisees not only exposes their misunderstanding, but sets them up to hear the greatest, the most comforting message ever to be heard.

Here are a few of the points from last Sunday's sermon. One is that what is important to God is what's on the inside, namely the heart. Living the life of faith in the Lord is not about outward display. It is not about how we appear to others. It is not about others perceive us Christians to be good and morally upright people, disciplined, and even rigid in our traditions. But, is about what Jesus Christ has done for us. It is about Jesus taking upon His own shoulders the unbearable burden of the guilt of our sins. He is the One who suffered. He is the One who died. All so we can be free from the punishment of our sin, free from death, and instead given an everlasting life on into the Paradise of Heaven. This is what our life of faith in Jesus Christ is about friends, and this is what we have most surely been given. We can be sure of this.

To further help us understand Jesus' response to the Pharisees' criticism, there is a clear distinction, a fundamental difference, between Pharisaism and Christianity. And, Pastor Radtke brought this out last Sunday. The difference lies in the teachings about the natural condition of man's heart. The Pharisees taught that man has a 'good disposition' by nature and a free will to choose what is good. For Jesus, however, the starting point is just the opposite. According to Jesus, our hearts are by nature evil. As Jesus stated clearly, and as we hear in our Gospel, "*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.*"

The Pharisees had it backwards. They thought what was outside, surrounding us is what makes us evil. So, they set up all these rules and regulations for everyone else to live by in order to preserve what they thought was naturally good, our hearts. Jesus wanted them to understand that this is not at all the way it is. He wanted them to understand because He cared for them, He loved them, and He wanted them to have the comforting truth and promise of His message.

This backwardness, this Pharisaism, if that's what we choose to call it, is not something of the past. The misunderstanding the Pharisees had is a result of the condition everyone, including each of us, is born into this

world having- spiritual death from the inside. And, that spiritual death makes itself evident by what comes out of the mouth, by what is done with our hands, what is looked at with our eyes, what is heard with our itchy ears....

And, the Pharisees, and what they believed, what their traditions were used for, serves as an example to all of us what we are naturally. The Pharisees wanted to protect and guard the good stuff they thought they had inside. So, they set up rules for them and everyone else to live by. Eventually, they became so entrenched in in their misunderstanding of the real condition of their hearts their faith was soon found in their own outward practices.

You could say their rules and regulations were tradition. And, a simple way to define 'tradition', anything we do a second time the same way we did it the first time. And, as Pastor Radtke pointed out last Sunday, tradition is not a bad thing at all. Our lives are filled full of tradition. We have our daily routines. We have our weekly routine attending worship service. We have our routines of Bible-study, devotion, and prayer. Even here at Trinity Lutheran Church, we have certain traditions, many of them long-standing from over generations ago. Nothing wrong with traditions. In fact traditions can be very pleasing to God.

What makes the difference in what we do routinely in life and with our lives is not the 'what we do', but rather, the 'why we do what we do'.

One example to illustrate this always comes to my mind. It is the account of Abel's murder by Cain. I'll read a few verses from that account. Genesis 4:3-8, "*In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. The LORD said to Cain, 'Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.'* Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him."

Abel brought an offering to the LORD, and so did Cain. Their offerings were different. Yet, the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but not for Cain and his. Why was that? Reading Hebrews 11:4- "*By faith Abel offered to God, a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.*"

The fundamental difference between Cain's gift to the LORD and Abel's was that Abel's was a fruit of his faith in the LORD as His Savior. In other words, Abel gave to the LORD because he was thankful for the LORD's Promise to forgive him for all his sins. Cain did it for another reason. Cain's offering was not a fruit of his faith in the LORD. Without it being exactly that Cain attempted to make himself look good before the LORD and others. One thing that always catches my attention concerning this account of Cain and Abel, who knows, perhaps in our eyes Cain's offering would have been a much grander offering than Abel's, but it was not a fruit of his faith. Again, it is not the 'what we do', but, rather, the 'why we do what we do'.

Back to the account of Jesus and the Pharisees as we have it in our Gospel reading this Sunday and last. What Jesus was getting at with the Pharisees was that they needed to acknowledge the truth of what was really in their hearts. They couldn't hide from Jesus what was inside their hearts. He knew it all. They could, perhaps, hide the evil in their hearts from others by obeying their man-made rules and regulations, 'look how good and righteous we are'. But, they could not hide this from Jesus, for Jesus was God in the flesh, and God knows all that is in our hearts.

Jesus was exposing what was in their hearts friends. He was exposing what they wanted to ignore, and what they didn't want others to know about. The fact that they didn't want to be reminded of the evil in their hearts and didn't want others to know about it, is the 'why they did what they did'. And, their 'why' was wrong, and Jesus wanted them to understand this.

This is what Jesus does. This is what the Word of the Lord does. It exposes what is in our hearts. It makes us aware of the spiritual death, the evil. It exposes the source of the evil that comes out of our mouths, and what is done with our eyes, looked at with our eyes, and heard with our itchy ears.

So, was Jesus continuing this discussion with the Pharisees simply to prove that He was right and they were wrong? Well, let us consider the 'why' Jesus was exposing the content of their hearts. First of all it was the truth. Second, Jesus wanted them to be comforted that He was there in the flesh to take the guilt of their evil hearts and their sin to the Cross for them. Jesus loved these men. He was there to die for them so they could be

free from it all. Jesus would not have even had to stick around. He could have left these men in their misunderstanding, but He did not because He loved them and wanted them to be saved.

That is the reason the Lord exposes the contents of anyone's heart. To give understanding exactly why He allowed Himself to suffer and die.

Transformation of men's hearts, from hearts turned against Him in evil, to hearts turned toward Him in thankfulness and love, has been the Lord's plan from all eternity. This plan was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. And, there He was with those Pharisees to do exactly that for them.

Friends, the question we must ask ourselves is this, is there any reason to hide from the Lord what is in our hearts? Is there any reason to hide from others what is in our hearts? The Lord knows what is in our hearts. He knows our hearts are naturally evil and unclean. Yet, all the while He knew full well what is in our hearts He proceeded with the plan for Him to suffer and die to save us. Yes, that is what is meant when it is said, 'Jesus died to save His enemies.'

Friends, we do not ever need to hide our hearts from the Lord. We don't need to pretend we don't have those evil thoughts we have, or mutter those evil words. The Lord knows all this before these things even happen. And, because of what He has done for us, His horrific suffering and death, we are able to approach His throne and say, 'Lord Jesus, Search My Heart!' Yes, 'Jesus, search my heart, for I know you died to save me from the punishment I deserve for all my wickedness.' The Psalmist pleaded with the Lord, "Search me, O God, and know my heart!" The Psalmist was not afraid of what the Lord would find, for His faith remained in the Lord's promise to forgive him for all his evil ways.

Consider the traditions we have in life friends. Not just here in our worship service here at Trinity Lutheran Church, but everyday of our lives. Why do we do what we do? May we always start at the point where Jesus died for us while we were still His evil enemies from our very hearts. May we always begin where Jesus began, from our hearts, to save us from the inside out. May we begin where the Holy Spirit begins by creating faith, perfect faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin and death, from within the very core of our hearts.

While it is true, none of us can see into the heart of anyone else. While it is also true that none of us can see what's exactly in our own hearts, it is true that the Lord knows fully what is in our hearts. The greatest news we can ever receive, the greatest news we have received is that the Lord has loved us and continues to love us despite what is in there. That is gloriously evident in the fact that He went through with His Father's plan to be the Sacrificial Lamb to bear the punishment we deserve.

What would we be without what He has done for us? Yet, we are free. Free to approach His throne with thankful and joyous hearts assured that He is always willing to forgive us, His children. We are free to live our lives in thankfulness and joy doing all that we do to the glory of our Lord that He is our Savior.

Traditions, customs, routines, we cannot avoid them. Whatever we do, may we do it out of thankfulness for what the Lord has first done for us, giving Him the glory for who we now are and what we do. Be assured friends, why you do what you do in your life comes from the source, from the new heart the Lord has given to you. It is a heart turned toward Him in all true happiness and joy. May we enjoy this new life we have, serving Him in all our ways, all the days of our lives. Amen.