

Pentecost 15B

September 2, 2018

Hymns: 243, 474, 415, 588 v2,7

***Grace and peace to you from Him (Who never changes!), Who IS, and Who WAS, and Who is to come! Amen!***

First in Four Part Series: *Characteristics of Jesus' Followers.*

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

**JESUS' FOLLOWERS HAVE A PROPER ATTITUDE TOWARD CHANGE**

Dear WELS members of Emmanuel and guests,

How many WELS Lutherans does it take to change a light bulb? The answer, of course, is: "Change?!" WELS Lutherans are not the only ones who have trouble with change. Anytime change takes place in any institution, particularly the church, there is resistance. ***Jesus' Followers Have a Proper Attitude Toward Change.*** Sometimes though, the "tried and true," the traditional way of doing things is hard to let go.

The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus one day and saw some of His disciples eating food without washing their hands. This wasn't a question of hygiene, but of tradition. The Jews had a ritual for washing hands –

baptizing, if you will - as well as for the baptizing of cups, pitchers, kettles, even their tables, each time they sat down to eat! The disciples of Jesus neglected these ancient ceremonies. So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, ***"Why don't Your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?"***

Jesus is somewhat harsh in His reply. He says, ***"Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: 'These people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. They worship Me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.' You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men."*** Jesus was a practicing Jew, yet He did not want His disciples to be slaves to Jewish tradition. We may wonder, why not?

**Tradition is a powerful force in our lives.** That is not only true in religion, but in all of society. We have our family traditions. One of the most popular stories in our circles is about the grandmother who always cut the ends off the ham before baking it in the oven. The daughter did likewise all her grownup years, until the teenage granddaughter finally asked why. Not knowing the explanation, the mother called up grandma to find out the answer. "The reason I cut the ends off the hams," said the grandmother, "is because they were always too long for my pan!" We have traditions in our families, some of which are wholesome and make all the sense in the world...and some, perhaps not. But tradition shows up in everything we do. Tradition has an impact on our daily lives.

**Traditions give us our identity and, to a certain extent, set borders on our behaviors.** We have traditions according to our cultural heritage. We even have traditions according to the region of the country we live in and which sports team we follow or what hobby we may have. Traditions give us a sense of our identity. For the Jews this had been important from the beginning. They correctly viewed themselves as set apart by God as a holy people, and their traditions helped them maintain their identity and set borders on their behaviors.

Many of us remember the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, and the role that Jewish tradition played in the plot of that melodrama. In many ways traditions are a good thing. In Old Testament times many traditions were good for the Jews. However, traditions can get out of hand. In the eyes of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, to eat with unclean hands was worse than how a person treated one's neighbors or even one's parents. Read the verses from this chapter omitted from our text to get a taste of this! The traditions had taken over the religion. And this is the greatest danger of traditions.

**Traditions and social morals may serve as a substitute for God and His Word.** Traditions may tell us what was appropriate for our ancestors, but they may not be reliable indicators for how we should live today. Jesus was continually saying to His disciples, "You have heard it said . . . , but I say unto you . . ." Tradition is one guide for our behavior, but only one. Times change. Situations change. God's Word is something that does not change. It is a lamp to our feet and a light for our path for all

generations!

So, when people say it isn't that big a deal to remain virgin until marriage, or that regarding living together – “I guess that's just the way young people do things these days, and maybe it's best to find out whether the couple are right for one another...” This “new tradition” of the past few generations doesn't hold any water with God. He is clear in His Word on this matter. After 45 years of allowing the killing of unborn children in our nation, how much longer can the debate continue before abortion simply becomes a tradition in our American culture? In another vein, there has always been divorce in our culture. But it used to be looked upon with horror. Now it has become casually accepted – and we shrug our shoulders and say, “Oh well,” while it destroys the basic fabric of society – the family.

What we have to remember is that there is a sinful nature – our old Adam – in each of us that needs to be continually suppressed. Jesus wasn't anywhere as nearly concerned about how food went into a person as what comes out of a person. And He wasn't talking about what happens in the restroom either. He was talking about something far worse. Listen again!: ***Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'....What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean'. For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean'.***

The Pharisees and the teachers of the Law mentioned in our text, not only didn't acknowledge the corruptness of their human flesh, they put their confidence in their flesh. What is more, they did so in a way that made them hypocrites and demolishers of God's own Word. They reduced the ceremonial commands of the Scripture and their own traditions to outward acts they could perform without actually involving the heart. That's why Jesus applied the words of Isaiah 29:13 to them: ***These people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. They worship Me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.*** What a tragic loss - when we remember that God's Old Testament ceremonial laws were meant to prepare the way for Christ!

When God created man and woman, He placed His moral law into their hearts so that they might conduct their lives as obedient children of God. Unfortunately they sinned, and death is the wages of sin. The only solution was the one God provided. He promised the Savior Who would fully keep the law in their place and pay for their sins. In order that this promise might be fulfilled, God chose the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as the nation into which would be born the Savior of the entire world. To make sure that they would remain separate from all other nations, God repeated His will as summarized in the Ten Commandments, and then He gave them numerous ceremonial laws that would set them apart from the other nations.

As the years passed, Israel ignored God's Word more and more. Many forgot the promise and zeroed in on the

commandments of God as the way to heaven. Still there were always such who clung to the promise and recognized the ceremonial laws as a way to safeguard the existence of the Gospel promise. Later, during the fourth and third centuries before the birth of Jesus, there were Jews who considered the moral law of the Ten Commandments and the ceremonial laws God had given them as insufficient. So they augmented them and finally came up with 613 rules regulating Israel's life down to the smallest details. The Gospel promise was ignored, and salvation became something to be earned by one's own righteousness. In many families, this became the "tradition" they passed down to their children. But not so with all, as we learn from Anna the prophetess, who after Jesus was presented in the temple **"spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem."** (Luke 2:38)

God's moral law – briefly outlined in the Ten Commandments – still stands. We know, of course, that we cannot save ourselves by keeping them. You and I are sinners through and through. The list of sins that Jesus enumerated as coming from within a human's heart.....speak condemnation to each and every one of us! We are saved only by Christ and His Gospel working in our hearts through faith.

The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were deeply religious people, but they had begun substituting their traditions for God's way of salvation. Even if God Himself came to them and tried to change their traditions, they would not listen. Indeed, God did come to them in the

person of Jesus of Nazareth. They would not listen. Instead, they nailed Him to a tree. Do you see that the same thing could happen to us? It has certainly happened to us in the past. Indeed, we might say one of our traditions is resistance to "change." ***For you see, the Bible defines repentance as a CHANGE of heart. May we all repent – every day!***

Suppose it were our tradition to have only people of a certain race in our church? Or a certain way of worshiping God? Can you see that there might come a time when God would say to us that it is time for us to move out of our comfort zone--to accept people we have previously shut out – that we should be willing to accept some change for their sake? This might be necessary for the sake of Jesus Christ! At Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church – ***"Some things can't change. Some things can change. Some things need to change."*** God give you members of this congregation the faith and the knowledge of His Word to know the difference, and the Christian strength to act accordingly – and correctly! ***Followers of Jesus have a proper attitude toward change.*** God help us! Amen!

***Now to Him Who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, to Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen!***